VIDEO GAMES™

10 Pages of Reviews

Including: Tron, Caveman, Kangaroo, Pitfall & Arcadia 2001

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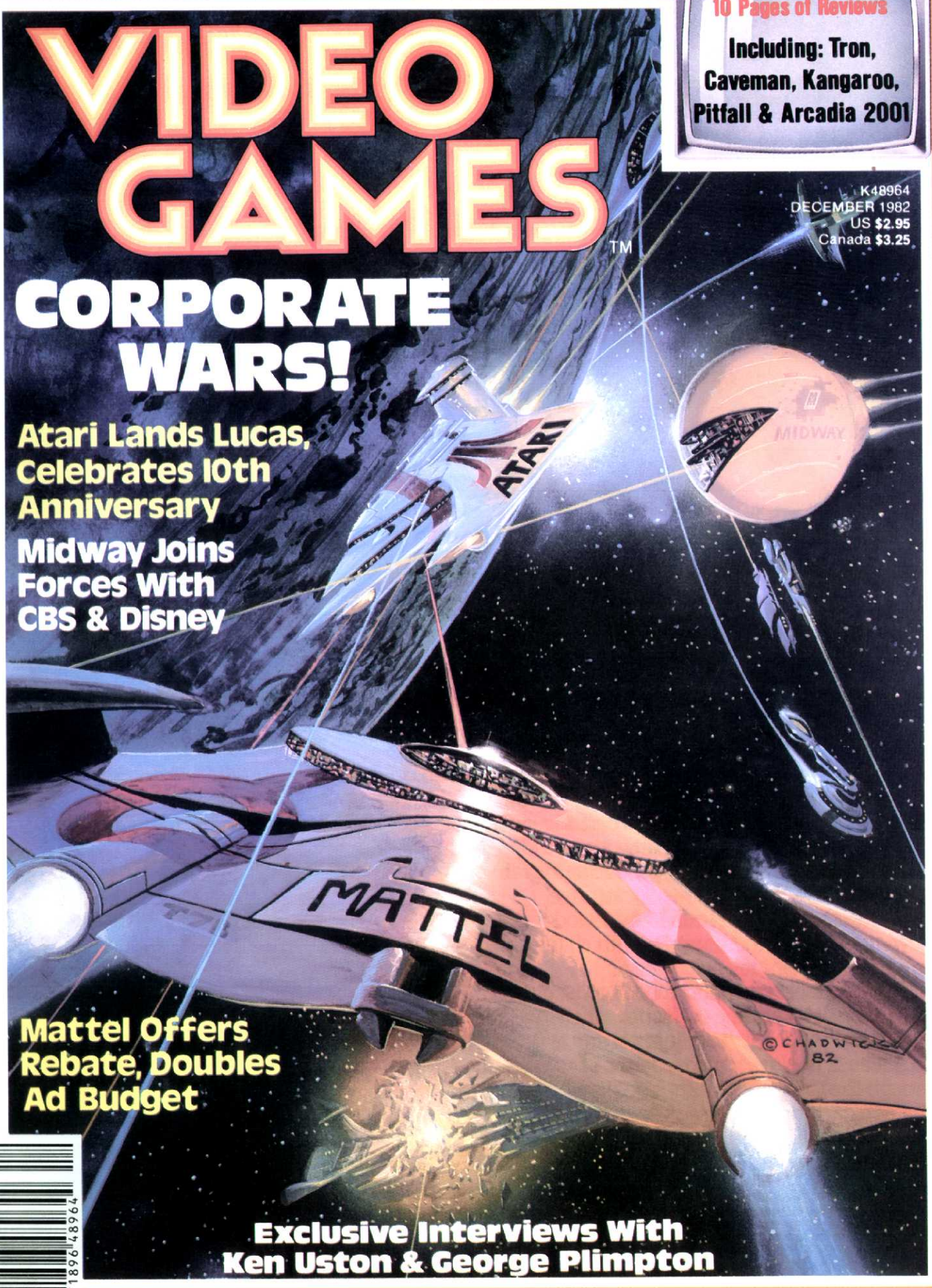
CORPORATE WARS!

Atari Lands Lucas, Celebrates 10th Anniversary

Midway Joins Forces With CBS & Disney



Mattel Offers Rebate, Doubles Ad Budget

Exclusive Interviews With Ken Uston & George Plimpton

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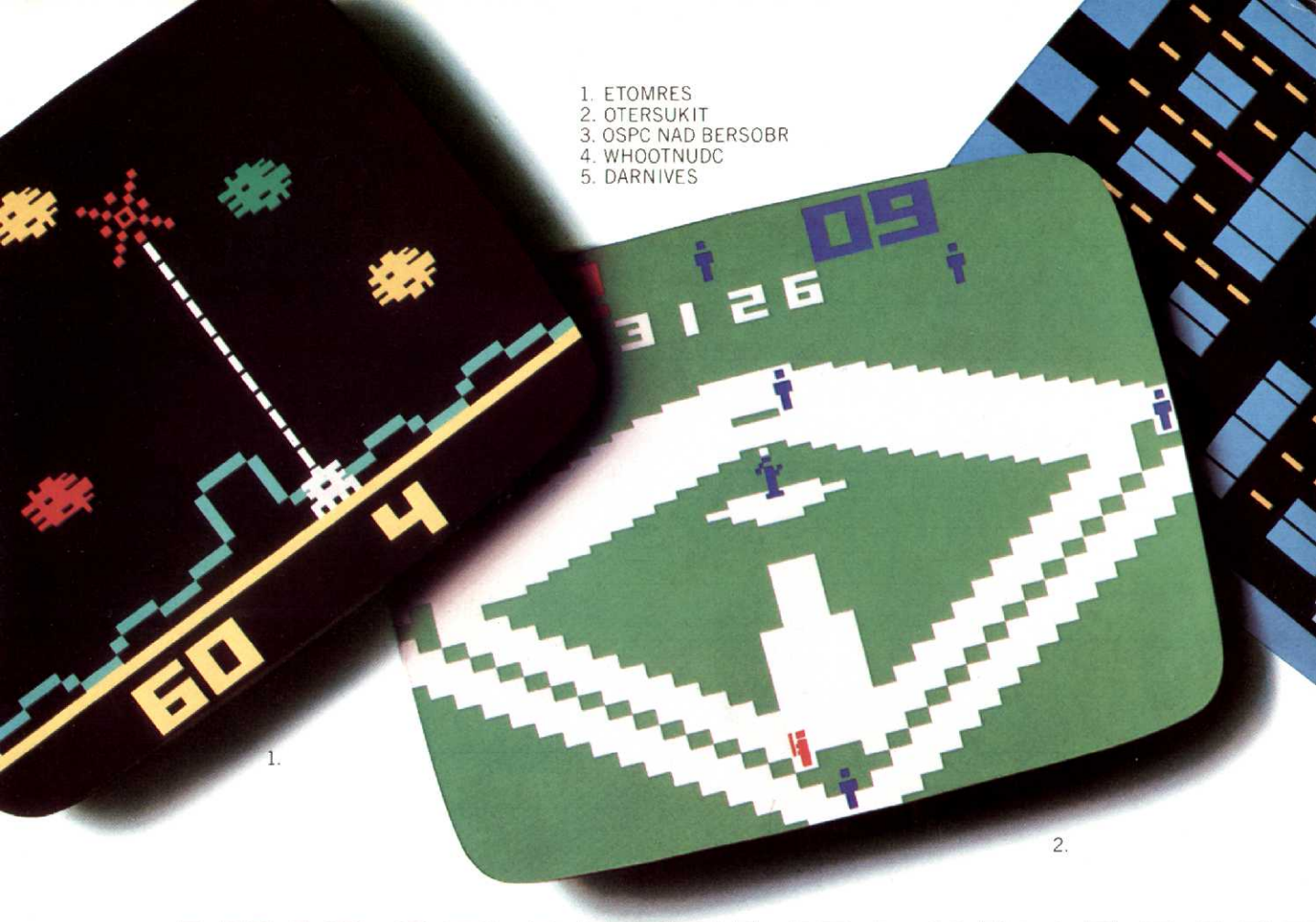

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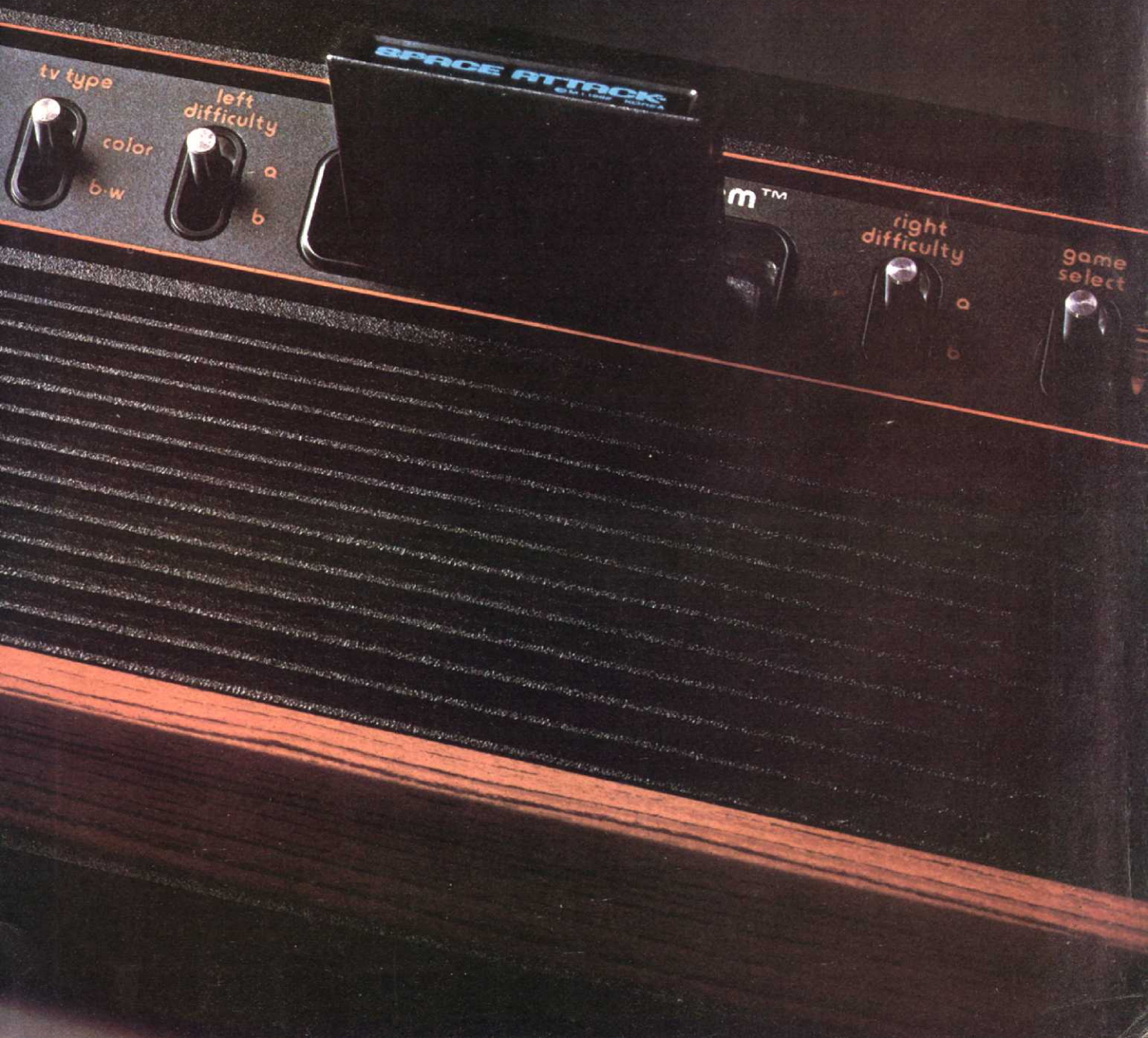

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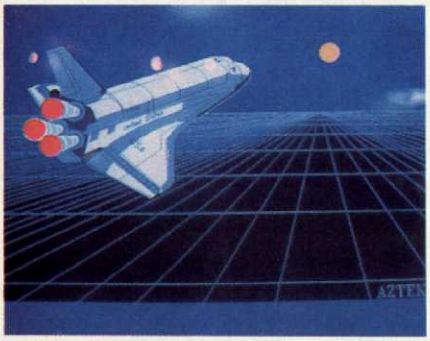

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The Selling of Intellivision 32
The maker of Barbie has come a long way, baby. An inside look at Mattel and its prime-time duel with Atari. Also, a rare interview with George Plimpton. Susan Prince and Steve Hanks do the job.

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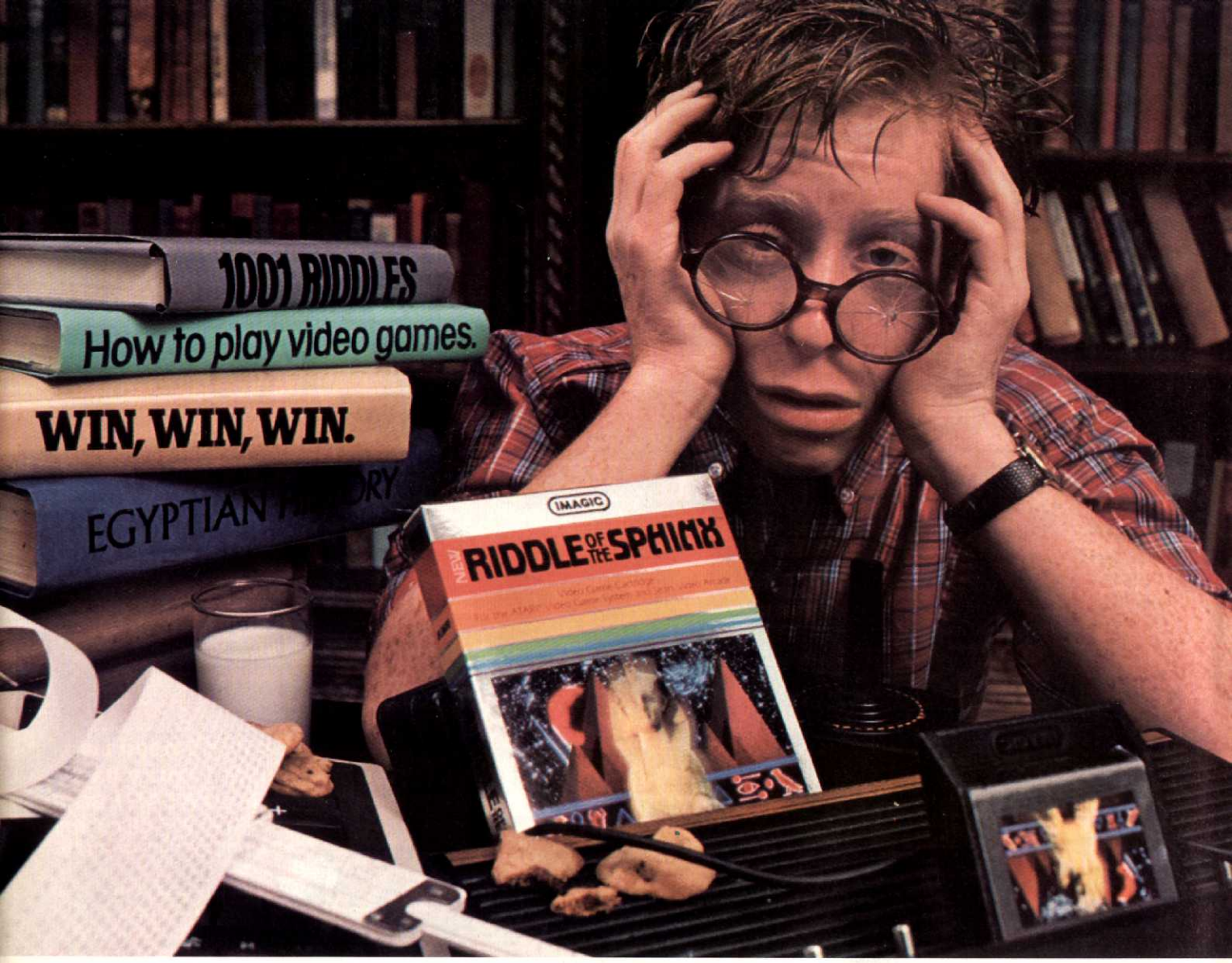

GARY LARSEN THOUGHT HE HAD ALL THE ANSWERS.

Gary had an IQ of 162. He never got anything less than an "A" on his report card. He was a wiz at chess.

Then it happened.

Gary plugged Imagic's Riddle of the Sphinx™ into his Atari® Video Computer System™.

As Gary slowly, carefully made his way across Egypt's mysterious Valley of the Kings, he was attacked by rock-throwing thieves, plagued by scorpions, and tortured by thirst.

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After passing the Sphinx, the Temple of Isis, the Great Pyramids, he reached the Temple of Ra where he presented all his treasures.

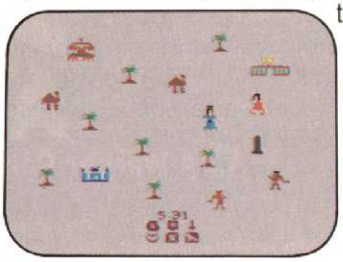
Unfortunately, he did not have the correct offering. Ra was not satisfied. Gary had to go back and try again.

And again. And again. And again. And again. And again. And again.

Here you see Gary as he is today. A veggie. Zonked out. Totally.

This is a warning. Imagic games are created by experts *for experts*. Do not try to solve the Riddle of the Sphinx if your IQ is equal to or less than your belt size.

After all, a brain is a terrible thing to fry.



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VIDEO GAMES

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HYPERSPACE

As I sit here at the typewriter the P.L.O. is evacuating Beirut. The Atlanta Braves have lost 11 games in a row, allowing the Dodgers to climb back into first place. The President has decided that we'd be better off paying more taxes after all. The Mets, my team, are in the cellar.

And as I sit here clicking away at these keys somebody's writing a program, designing new hardware, scheming to sell us one more video game. Atari and Mattel are surely preparing strategies for the upcoming Christmas campaign. George Plimpton is rehearsing his lines. Alan Alda, voted the most likely celebrity to represent a game company ("Gamer Results," Oct. issue), is probably receiving overtures this very minute.

Yes, it's a war out there. Mattel is making games for Atari, Atari is talking turkey with George Lucas, and Midway has to have a Son of Pac-Man (see "Bernie," page 73) up its sleeve. Mattel, Atari, Midway, the big three. To a great extent, that's who this third issue of *VIDEO GAMES* is about. Starting on page 28, there's "The Selling of Intellivision." Susan Prince traces Mattel's history—from Barbie to video games—and tells of the company's never-ending struggle to become number one. Then, there's "The House That Pac Built" (page 52), Andrea Stone's tale of how Midway leapfrogged over Atari to become the king of the arcades. Finally, there is "From Cutoffs to Pinstripes"—the incredible saga of the company that started it all, Atari. In the 12-page special anniversary section (pp. 37-50), you will read about the $500 investment that became a $2 billion business in 10 short years, and about many of the company's early players who got lost in the corporate shuffle. Also, we present a photo gallery of 27 of Atari's most memorable coin-op games. (Special thanks to Jamie Pinto at Atari who donated many lunch hours to gather all the materials.)

Photo by Jan Pierce

Roger Dionne

On a lighter note, Roger Dionne returns to these pages with a revealing account of his ordeal writing *A Buyer's Guide to Home Video Games 1983* (which should be in bookstores sometime in October) in the Book Beat section (page 60), and a lively interview with fellow author and sometimes gambling partner Ken Uston (page 22). Dionne's own story is an interesting one as well.

Born and raised in Connecticut some 40 odd years ago, he graduated Yale and earned his Master's at Georgetown en route to becoming an English professor. After 15 years of teaching the art of writing to college students, Dionne decided it was time to be a writer himself and so, in 1975, he left the comforts of campus life behind for the carefree existence of a freelance scribe. Dionne soon began writing a weekly book review column for the *Los Angeles Times* and landed an editorial position at the magazine *Gambling Times*. Since then, he's written more than 200 articles for 40 different publications.

Dionne is a gamester in the true sense of the word. He's as happy battling sundry video creatures (Astrocade's Wizard is his current favorite) as he is sitting at a poker table (though he's sometimes more animated about the latter—see the Book Beat column). But writing is his real love. "Great writing," he explains, "can appear in a book on video games as surely as it can in a novel or poem."

Roger, I know exactly how you feel.

S.B.

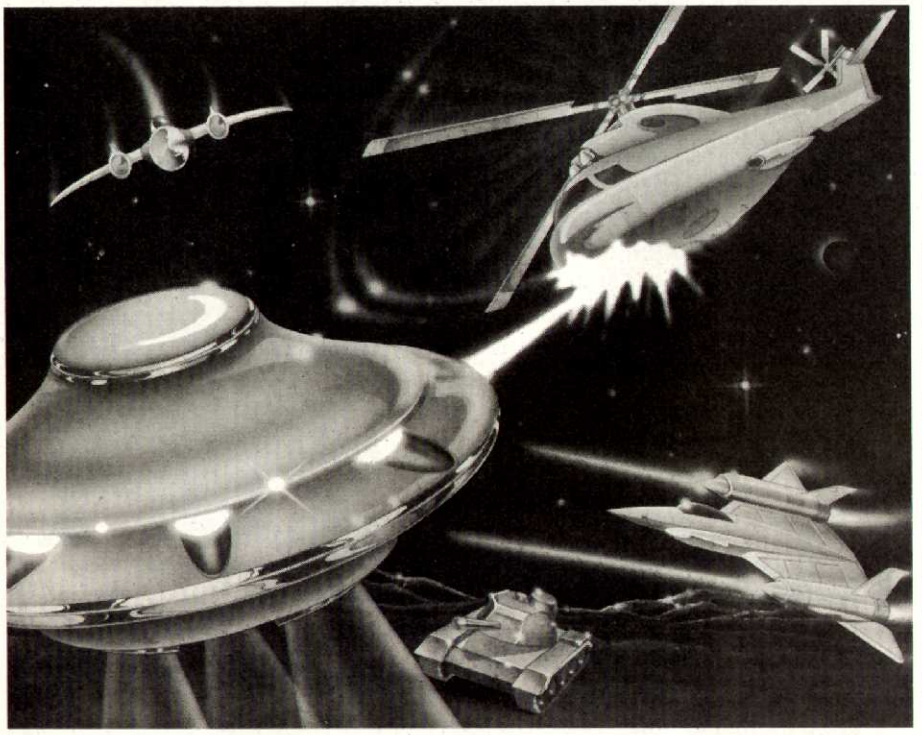
"SWEATY PALMS ARE GUARANTEED"

5 EXCITING NEW GAMES!

US GAMES NEWS

SURPRISE ATTACK ON YOUR ATARI® SYSTEM!

ALIENS TAKE OVER THE EARTH!



Alien Attack Is Non-Stop. Photon Torpedoes Are Suspected

YOU AND YOU ALONE CAN SAVE PLANET!

★ ★ ★

Reliable sources have confirmed that aliens have taken over the earth. Every moving earth vehicle is theirs and so is the land. In a surprise move, you have captured one of their flying saucers. You scream through space ...to the right, left...up, down... firing directable missiles into hundreds of alien ships, missiles and obstacles. But that doesn't stop the aliens. They fire back relentlessly. Can you beat the aliens with their own machine? You can...if you're fast enough...accurate enough...if you don't lose your nerve!

The name of the game is Space Jockey. Beat it if you can!

★ ★ ★

FOUR MORE HOT ONES!

WORD ZAPPER! Your spaceship can fire right and left to zap deadly meteors... while firing overhead to zap out the letters of an alien language...in the order commanded by the computer!

TOWERING INFERNO! You tackle a different fire-filled maze on every floor! Work against the clock, mazes and flames to fly people to safety...if you can!

COMMANDO RAID! With one lone gun, defend your city from helicopters, bombers and android parachutists who will land and tunnel under your cities to get you...if they can!

SNEAK 'N PEEK! All the fun and thrills of old-fashioned hide 'n seek in a spooky video world. Beat the clock...and the computer or a friend.

FOR FULL COLOR VERSIONS OF THESE GAMES, SEE YOUR DEALER!

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Double Speak

Rumble in the Jungle

I suggest that your magazine shouldn't throw any stones at glass houses. I read John Holmstrom's stinging Book Beat column ("The Official I-Hate-Video-Games-Books Column") in your Oct. issue which criticized all those how-to books and showed how dumb and useless they really are. Then I glanced at "Dr. J's Rules of the Robotron Jungle," and all I can say is that your magazine must certainly learn how to take some of its own medicine. You'd think that since [Eugene] Jarvis himself was the game designer, he'd give us more sound gameplay advice than the elementary hints that were given. Any fool who has at least spent eight quarters on the machine already knows offhand every statement made in the Robotron article.

To prove my point, look at the general statements made in the article. First: "Learn the controls"—an inane statement since there are only two controls to speak of. If you don't know how to learn two simple controls, you can't play the game in the first place. So much for helpful hint #1.

Second: "Never stay in the middle of the screen"—by the time the player is experienced enough to reach the level where this information is really useful, he already knows it offhand anyway. So much for helpful hint #2.

Third: "Learn the characteristics of each type of robotron"—knowledge which can be obtained by simply watching the demo mode of the machine itself or simply watching another person play. So much for helpful hint #3.

You know, after I read the first five paragraphs of Holmstrom's article, I thought he didn't know what he was

Buyers' Guidelines

Gamers are a spunky lot. Below, you'll find letters from two who had the nerve to knock Roger "Buyer's Guide" Dionne.

I must differ with your criticism of Mattel's NFL Football Cartridge. You accurately stated that in order to pass, the receiver is keyed to a zone towards which the ball automatically travels when "thrown." That, you claim, makes NFL Football easier to master than other football cartridges. In fact, the opposite is true. Since the defender can easily key on a receiver and anticipate the programmed reception zone, the video quarterback must devise a way of completing his pass outside that zone. In theory this is simple, but only can be accomplished with skill and timing. As the receiver heads for the zone, release the pass quickly. To prevent the ball from reachiing the receiver before he enters the predesignated zone, move the receiver into the path of the ball. This greatly enhances the game by making possible such plays as look-ins, square-outs and buttonhooks.

You also completely neglected the running game. By establishing the run—I suggest sending a man in motion using the pass key, which draws a defender away from the play—you open up the pass. With this in mind, play selection is almost unlimited. In light of these facts, I think the cartridge deserves better than a five on your rating scale for interest.

Gregg Wallace
Mentor, Ohio

Dionne suggests firing non-stop at the shield in Yar's Revenge and only eating a piece of the shield to get your cannon. At slower speeds, though, it is just as easy to gobble up the whole shield rather than just one piece, and this increases your score almost threefold. Also, with a little experience you can shoot the swirl in midair for 5,000 points. Unfortunately, this makes for a slower, more boring game (although higher scoring) and will lower the interest rating by a point or two.

In Star Voyager, Dionne claims it is not easy to escape from an enemy. This is not necessarily so. If the enemy is just appearing on the radar screen, it is very easy to avoid by quickly steering your ship hard in the opposite direction. In my opinion, this flaw lowers the interest rating at least two notches.

One game that also has serious flaws which he didn't rate is Imagic's Cosmic Ark. I've found that you can stay in space forever on low levels without picking up creatures and thus gaining easy points. If you begin to lose energy, pick up only one of the creatures, then lose it the next time you visit that planet. You will end up with a quarter of a tank more fuel. This is a true shame since without this flaw Cosmic Ark would have been one of the year's best.

Jim Perilli
Mont Clare, Pa.

Is that so? We welcome all opinions and game tips from avid gamers like Mssrs. Wallace and Perilli. Like they say, keep those cards and letters coming.—Ed.

talking about. But when I finished the article and then I looked at Jarvis' tips on Robotron, I realized that he made a lot of sense.

Isaias Banegas
New York, N.Y.

Jarvis replies: Get off my back puerile nitpicker! Of course the "How-to-Beat Video Games" books are generally useless pulp, written by masquerading charlatans out for a fast buck. However, throwing my noble efforts onto this dungheap is a grave miscarriage of justice bordering on outright fraud. Mr. Banegas complains that the first two rules are too basic. Poppycock! Like any classic video game, Robotron is built upon a few elementary elements—easy to understand, yet difficult to master. The player can progress only through total mastery of these simple principles, in particular achieving independence of control between movement and firing.

Mr. Banegas' final contention, that the Robotron's characteristics revealed were trivial and obvious, is totally inept. If he had bothered to read this section he would have found a gold mine of useful psychological data to battle the Robotron menace. A final word to Mr. Banegas: "Have you hugged a Hulk today?

P.S.: For those interested in the real secrets to Robotron, send $20 to Dr. J., care of this magazine. Please allow 6-8 weeks for me to leave the country after cashing your check.

Supercharged-up

After reading your second issue from cover to cover twice, I would like to submit an opinion of mine. On page 33, "The Art of Video Games" article states, ". . . there's a real race for the next state-of-the-art breakthrough. . . ." I think this breakthrough could already be here and is mentioned almost in passing on page 16 of the same issue ("Software Update: Eight's Company").

Arcadia Video Games announced its Supercharger unit which uses cassette tape as its program. Both plug into the game console. By deduction, isn't this the start of program interchangeability between video game formats (i.e., a Supercharger for Atari, a Supercharger for Intellivision and the same standard cassette tape for both)? For that matter, why not use a disc drive or videodisc and, possibly in the future, bubble memory through the Supercharger? Think of the possibilities of having a home game with unlimited memory.

The Supercharger could interface the "lowly" video game with large computer programs for some really complex and mind-blowing games and graphics. Arcadia might hold the key with which we might unlock our game consoles to reveal the supergame within.

Edward J. Holbeck
Hamilton, Ontario

For more info. on Arcadia, see page 17.—Ed.

Settling a Score

I really enjoyed your Oct. issue and am waiting anxiously for the next. I read most of the articles in the magazine, including the "TV-Games Buyer's Guide." In it you say the scoring goal for Astrosmash is 400,000 and I have conquered it. My two high scores are 499,950 and 487,840. Could you investigate to see what the high score is?

Sean (Kong) Arabi
Albany, Calif.

P.S. I got the nickname for being a whiz at Donkey Kong.

According to Mattel, 32 million is tops as of Aug. 6.—Ed.

Astro Booster

In your second issue it was stated in the Hard Sell article ("The $300 Question") that the Astrocade master component goes for $299.95, but I bought mine for $240 on sale. They usually go for $260, I believe. Furthermore, the fact that the Basic cartridge comes with all Astrocade units was not mentioned. The Basic cart may be child's play to some, but someone must be taking it seriously, because it is supported by two user's groups (in fact, they are the first user's groups). I find every video game other than Astrocade to be pretty much lacking in one way or another and that Astrocade is

(Continued on page 77)

BLIPS

Pac-Kojak? Move Over Deputy Dawg

As if Inky, Blinky, Pinky and Clyde weren't enough to contend with, now Pac-Man has the Nielsen ratings to worry about, too.

In September, Pac-Man debuted on the Saturday morning airwaves with a halfhour show all to his own. Arriving at 9 a.m. on ABC-TV, *Pac-Man* (the voice of Marty Ingels) features the little yellow fellow as a security guard in the Power Pellet forest. His job—to protect the energy food of the local Paclanders—is made that much more difficult by the presence of the evil Mezmaron (Allan Lurie) and his five ghostly accomplices. Joining Blinky and Pinky (the voices of Chuck McCann), Inky (Barry Gordon), and Clyde (Nielson Ross) is a she-ghost named Sue Monster (Susan Silo).

Illustration by Denis E. Orloff

After hours, Pac-Man, who has sprouted limbs for his TV series, is a family man married to Ms. Pac-Man (Barbara Mincus), with a child, Baby Pac (Russie Taylor), a pup called Chomp Chomp (Frank Welker), and a kitty, Sour Puss (Peter Cohen) rounding out their happy home.

The series comes from Hanna-Barbera which is also planning a half-hour prime time Pac-Man Christmas special.

—Sue Adamo

Are You Game Enough to Join a Club?

So you're a video game freak and you want to get piped into other game freaks to trade tips, cartridges, and stories about high scores. No problem. Networks of video game fanatics are springing up as fast as you can pop a cartridge into your "Atari," and they're just waiting for you to sign up. Here's a list of a few organizations and what they offer:

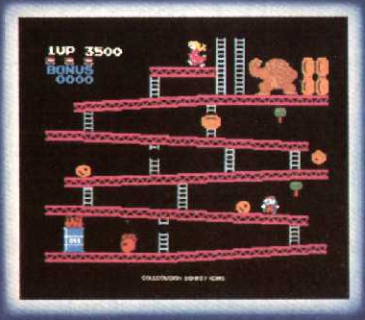
The **Video Game Club** (membership fee: $2.50), which boasts a membership of more than 11,000, offers a selection of TV-game cartridges at only one dollar above its cost (you can order Defender for $26.50) and a newsletter, and also sponsors contests like the recent Astro-smash tourney, which awarded prizes of up to $1,000 cash. Write: 4501 W. Aster Dr., Glendale, Ariz. 83504.

Xantor (one-time membership: $25) sells cartridges at a 15 to 25 percent discount (Defender goes for $27.95) and has an exchange service that allows you to unload unwanted carts for new but comparably priced ones and a $6 trade-in fee. Its newsletter includes previews of soon-to-be-available carts

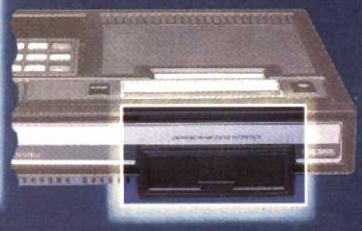
(Continued on page 17)

COLECO DELIVERS

COLECOVISION DELIVERS SUPERIOR RESOLUTION WITH ARCADE QUALITY GRAPHICS.



COLECOVISION DELIVERS AN EXPANSION MODULE INTERFACE FOR PERSONAL COMPUTER ADD-ON CAPABILITY.



COLECOVISION DELIVERS AN EXPANSION MODULE THAT PLAYS ALL ATARI® COMPATIBLE VCS™ SOFTWARE! (Available this fall)

COLECOVISION DELIVERS ADVANCED ARCADE-TYPE CONTROLLERS WITH JOY STICK AND 12 FUNCTION KEYBOARD.

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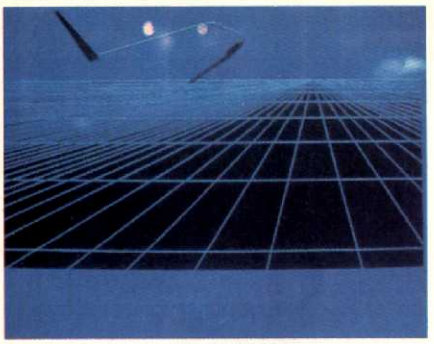
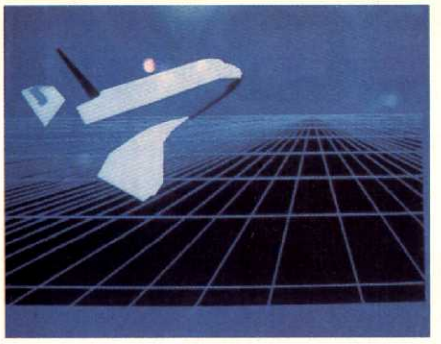
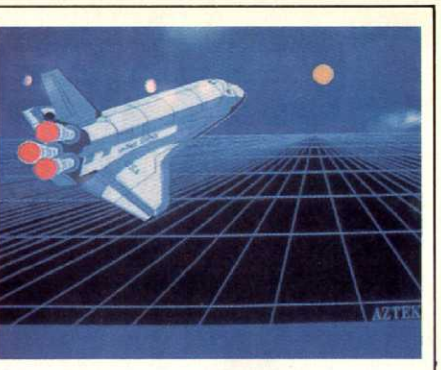
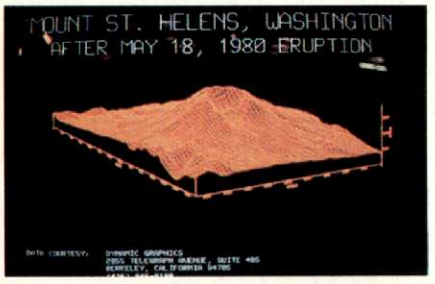

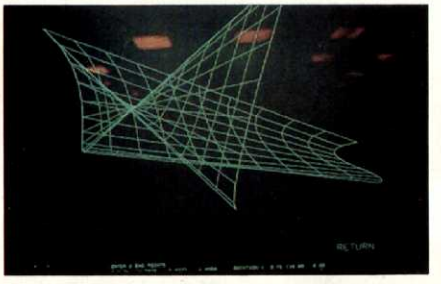
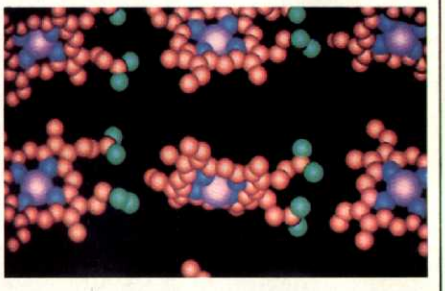
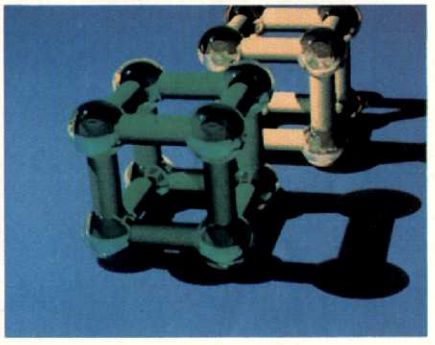
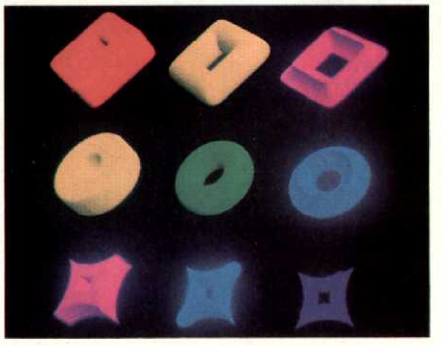
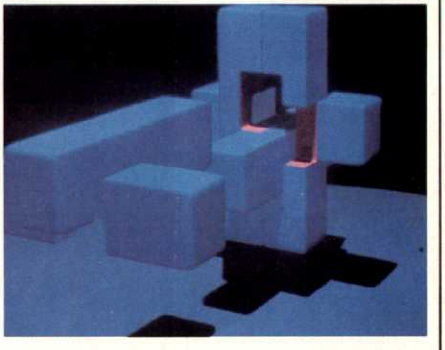

Photos by Michael Uffer

Siggraph '82: State of the (Computer) Art

"The crowd was incredibly excited. You felt a real sense of discovery in the air."

If you've seen *Tron*, the movie, and played Zaxxon and Turbo, the video games, you're well aware of the fantastic visuals computers are now capable of creating. But if you were among the thousands of art directors, engineers, designers and curiosity seekers who converged on Boston's cavernous Hynes Auditorium for Siggraph '82 the last week in July, you were treated to an even more revealing glimpse of the latest developments in the explosive world of computer imaging.

The show sent heads spinning, dazzling the overflow crowd with sophisticated state-of-the-art machinery. Reports *VIDEO GAMES* photographer Mike Uffer, whose work adorns this page: "The crowd was incredibly excited. A lot of people were there who had never been exposed to this before. You felt a real sense of discovery in the air."

For video gamers one thing was especially clear: Computer graphics technology is changing so rapidly it will make the game graphics of today seem prehistoric no later than three years from now. Computer images are finally becoming more natural and lifelike. Though created by complex calculations, they appear photographic—like so many of the landscapes in *Tron* that give the illusion of sets.

Aztec's Space Shuttle simulation (pictured in sequence above) is comparable to Zaxxon's graphics in many respects. Here, a computer-generated image takes shape. Techtronics exhibited a three-dimensional graph of the earth's surface after the Mount St. Helens eruption (middle row, left), while Jupiter Technology provided a 3-D look at molecular binding (middle row, center). The program was written by a chemist. The last four images are all creations of Raster Technologies. For each, a computer completes an artist's rough sketch by adding necessary details, plus shadows.

Game Clubs

(Continued from page 13)

and gaming tips. If you can prove with a photo that your score at a particular game is the best, Xantor will let the world know in the newsletter. Write: P.O. Box 5466, Scottsdale, Ariz. 85216.

The **American Video Athletes Association** ($12.50) contends that master video gamers should be recognized like other outstanding athletes. For the membership fee, you get a pocket guide to video athletics, rating levels for arcade games, a t-shirt, and a newletter focusing on said video athletes. Write: Badger Office Building, 120 W. Mifflin, Madison, Wis. 53703.

The **National Video Games Players Association** ($15) provides members with a certificate, I.D. cards, t-shirt and newsletter that includes names of current coin-op high scorers, game tips and reviews. Write: P.O. Box 280797, Dallas, Tex. 75228.

G.A.M.E.S. ($2) is basically a direct mail TV-game outlet. A newsletter informs members of its ever-growing catalog of cartridges and accessories as well as, well . . . news. Plus, buy ten carts, get one free! Write: 6626 Valjean Ave., Van Nuys, Calif. 91406.

Screen Sonics ($1) also has an extensive TV-game product catalog. Members receive discounts as well as the opportunity to exchange cartridges (only comparably priced ones) for $3.50 and purchase reconditioned game systems.

Not to be outdone by this band of video game entrepreneurs, Mattel, Atari, Magnavox and Activision have authorized their own game clubs. You know you're a member of the **Intellivision Game Club** ($1.50) when you receive an I.D. card and certificate signed by George Plimpton. Convince three friends to join at once and Plimpton sends you a $2.50 voucher towards your next cart purchase. A newsletter keeps everyone up-to-date on tourneys and new products. Write: P.O. Box Drawer No. 666, Milwaukee, Wis. 53278.

As an **Atari Club** ($1) member, you get a two-year subscription to *Atari Age*, a full-color magazine that previews cartridges, advertises accessories and gift items and, best of all, reminds readers of forgotten VCS carts like Maze Craze and Codebreaker. You also receive a $2 voucher towards the purchase of a new cart through the club. Write: 1700 Walnut St., Philadelphia, Pa. 19103.

To become a member of the **Odyssey Adventure Club**, you first must purchase a subscription to *Odyssey Adventure*, the company's quarterly magazine for $3. Inside, you'll find premium offers for accessory items, game tips, high scores, articles about Odyssey "adventures" and certificates and I.D. cards to clip and save. Write: 30400 Van Dyke, Warren, Mich. 48093

Activision, on the other hand, has about as many clubs as it does cartridges. Send in photos of high scores taken off the TV screen and you may, for instance, become a member of the "Laser Blast Hall of Fame" just like the brothers Nichols. (Jason, 6, and Stephen, 5, both qualified when they totaled one million points at Laser Blast each). Write: 2350 Bayshore Frontage Rd., Mountain View, Calif. 94043.

Finally, there is *Ken Uston's Newsletter* ($9.95/year). Brought to you by one of the game industry's foremost authorities, each month it includes all the gamer news that's fit to print. Uston's personalized prose is well worth the price of admission. Write: Uston Video Enterprises, P.O. Box 8080, Walnut Creek, Calif. 94596.

—Perry Greenberg

What's New

The latest in gamer accessories are these TV carts. Gusdorf (top left) has two sizes—13 ($50) and 19 ($80) inches. Look for them at K-Mart. Of Pyramid's two models, one is especially made for the Atari VCS (right). Both sell for $70 at specialty shops. (Or write: 8774 Grinnell, Detroit, Mich. 48213.) GCE's Vectrex (bottom left) is about as unique a self-contained game system as you'll ever see. A nine-inch vector monitor allows you to play any number of arcade-type games like Berzerk, Scramble and Rip-Off. The price: $200, plus $30 for each cart. (Mine Storm, a great Asteroids game, is included.) Arcadia's Supercharger (right) adds 6,272 bytes of RAM to the VCS' 128 for $70. Its games are on cassette ($15) and all look great. If you have a tape player, you're set.

Report: Drugs in Arcades

You've probably heard about parents and community groups trying to close down arcades because they're supposedly hang-outs for drug pushers and users. Are there really drugs to be found in arcades? In search of an answer to this nagging question, VIDEO GAMES dispatched crack coin-op scribe John Holmstrom to New York's "Arcade Row" in Times Square and several Brooklyn gaming establishments. Holmstrom came back with this report.

I've been around arcades for as long as I can remember, and I've been around drugs since high school. Although drugs have always been freely available in Times Square, where I've been playing for years, pushers usually have avoided the arcades. Not any more.

Recently, as I was entering the Fascination arcade, some strange guy demanded that I buy drugs—pot, cocaine, pills—from him. There he was, drumming up business outside the door, and the next thing I knew he had followed me inside. If it weren't for one of the changers, who chased him back out onto Broadway, I might have had to get rough with him.

Times Square is, of course, the sleazepit of the universe, and is not really a fair barometer of what's going on in arcades around the country. Still, I see more peddlers and prostitutes loitering near the Playlands these days than I can ever remember. There is little or no security in these places. If something isn't done about the Times Square scene soon, the industry can expect nothing but more bad publicity.

Brooklyn, I thought, would be a different story. First stop: King's Plaza, a typical suburban-style mall. Except for the 50-cent price tag on all the games, I could find little evidence of wrongdoing in this arcade. It was clean, secure and not particularly crowded. But could I buy drugs here if I so desired? Yes, explained my Brooklyn escort—just mention it to the right person and wait around the arcade to make the deal. We decided not to wait.

As it turned out, the farther we got away from the arcades, the seamier the scene became. There was the newsstand with machines in the back and a crowd hanging out front—anyone could have filled my prescription right on the spot—and the pizza parlor that featured games, chow and nickel bags if you asked for a small coke. And then I learned about the social club that has games, dames and just about everything else.

Let's face it—drugs can always be found where some form of entertainment is going on. Drugs are everywhere: Hollywood, sports, movie theatres, rock concerts, baseball stadiums. In fact, I'd say it's easier to score drugs in Yankee Stadium than in any arcade I've ever frequented. Does that mean we should close down Yankee Stadium?

The bottom line then is that if you want to score in an arcade, there's a strong chance you'll be able to do just that. But that's between you and the dealer. Most people I spoke with have never witnessed a drug sale in an arcade. "Sure, something should be done about drug abuse," one gamer told me, "but if anyone thinks that closing down arcades is the solution, they're crazy."

Scores: All in a Day's Work

When Walter Day isn't too busy racking up a million-and-a-half points on his favorite video game Make Trax, he's operating two arcades in Iowa and taking calls from high scorers like himself who just completed doing battle with one game or another and would like all the world to know. Day's Twin Galaxy gameroom in Ottumwa has become a video central of sorts. We called the other day to find out the latest on the greatest gamers.

- **Frenzy** 1,897,821
  Jay Bennett
  Konosha, Wis.
- **Frogger** 258,000
  Mark Robishak
  Mountview, Calif.
- **Defender** 49,367,750
  Marvin Norton
  Safford, Ariz.
- **Tempest** 3,086,355

Illustration by Ken Weiner

Leo Daniels
Wrightville Beach, N.C.

- **Kickman** 4,656,220
  Lois Lanhan
  Lancaster, Mo.
- **Galaga** 7,857,090
  Slate Thompson
  Wrightville Beach, N.C.
- **Robotron** 100,525,800
  Christopher Quade
  Chapel Hill, N.C.
- **Zaxxon** 970,500
  David Kaupp
  Santee, Calif.
- **Ms. Pac-Man** 283,680
  Jody Cagle
  Las Vegas, Nev.
- **Alpine Ski** 221,000
  Ray Bersabe
  Militas, Calif.
- **Centipede** 4,421,232
  Rijanto Joesoef
  Los Angeles, Calif.
- **Kangaroo** 152,350
  Henry Guerrero
  Safford, Ariz.
- **Wild Western** 405,400
  Don Bernard
  Santee, Calif.
- **Donkey Kong** 1,453,700
  Steve Sanders
  Clinton, Mo.
- **Thief** 1,512,970
  Mark Kiminski
  Bloomfield, N.J.
- **Bosconian** 442,400
  Peter Zenke
  Racine, Wis.
- **Qix** 532,628
  Gary Daley
  Missoula, Mont.
- **Dig Dug** 2,360,640
  Sean Dybdahl
  Las Vegas, Nev.
- **Looping** 295,550
  Charles Brown
  Wrightville Beach, N.C.
- **Stargate** 27,615,800
  Leo Daniels
  Wrightville Beach, N.C.

P.S.: Send your best scores to *VIDEO GAMES*, too. We'll compare them with Day's and if yours is tops, it'll be noted in this column.

Bull's-Eye

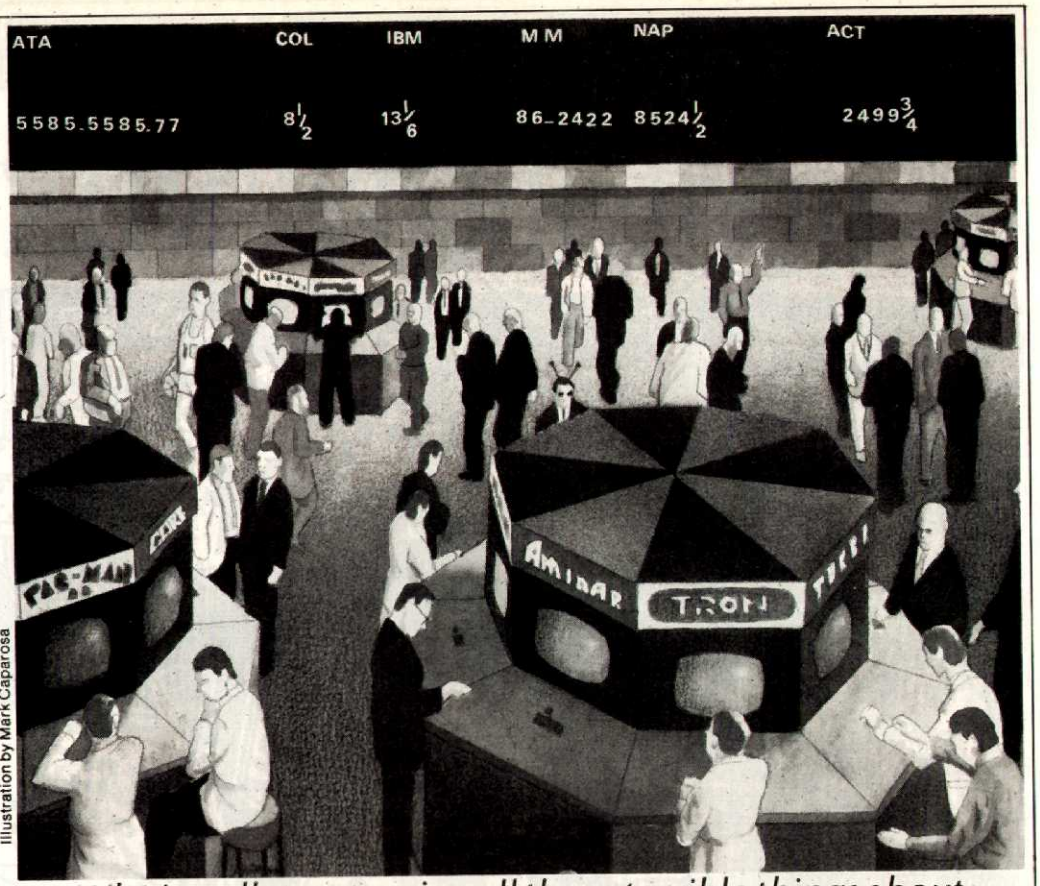

Illustration by Mark Caparosa

Why is wall street saying all those terrible things about video games? Only an analyst knows for sure.

How ironic! Just as the boom in video games is being heralded in the media, Wall Street is counseling investors to unload their shares in two of the acknowledged industry leaders, Warner Communications (parent company of Atari) and Mattel producer of Intellivision). Recently, both stocks were selling near their lows for the year, causing some professional investors to doubt the prospects of other companies in the industry as well.

On paper, it's hard to understand this sudden disenchantment. Clearly, the video game is the hottest consumer electronics product since the digital watch. The most optimistic domestic sales forecast for master components (Intellivision, VCS, Astrocade, etc.) this year tops out at eight million units, and cartridge sales could well exceed 60 million pieces. Figures like these are enough to make even the most skeptical retailer smile. Yet Wall Street is not impressed. I'll try to explain.

First, there is the issue of perception. Until a year ago, it was popularly held on Wall Street that the video game business was a high technology industry, and that the lack of compatibility of hardware and software stood as a barrier to the entry of many new competitors. While those of our readers in the trade may be surprised by the Street's naiveté, the belated recognition that compatibility had arrived and the industry would now be open to widespread competition had an impact of far-reaching importance. Activision was the first to prove that nobody in the business has a lock on the kind of know-how it takes to create a winning game. Stripped of the high technology banner, the shares of the industry pioneers were suddenly perceived as no longer as valuable as they once were.

Second, there is the dual question of market saturation and the level of competition for retail shelf space. Just how large is the domestic market for video games? It is frequently noted that some 80 million households have television sets. But how many of them can safely be included in the potential TV-game playing universe? What about the elderly, the poor, singles and those homes without children? By the end of 1982, consumers could own 15 million master components. Translation: unit sales will have doubled for the third consecutive year. That rate *will not* be maintained.

At the same time, the number of pieces of equipment available has increased dramatically. Eight companies exhibited video game hardware at the summer Consumer Electronics Show, and new-improved systems are being shipped or have been announced by three of the entrants. The situation in cartridges is even more congested. More than twenty companies are offering products, with a roster of titles well in excess of what the current universe of hardware can sustain. Wall Street expects a shake out accompanied by price cutting. None of this can be expected to accrue to the short-term benefit of the survivors. Put bluntly, every Atari-compatible cartridge that is sold is one less sale for Warner.

Finally, we come to the future. Is the home computer going to take over the industry and dominate the market? Will the overseas market develop as promised? How many cartridges can be sold each year and who will have the "hot property?" Without going into great detail (these questions will be addressed at length in future articles), it is sufficient to note that these questions give reason for uncertainty, and Wall Street hates uncertainty.

In summary, it should be pointed out that while the industry has broadened and sales have boomed, Wall Street is looking over the horizon and is not totally happy with what it sees. Video games are here to entertain. So are its direct competition: records, movies, toys and other leisure-time activities. Some professional investors, recognizing this after-the-fact, have simply begun to adjust their strategy accordingly.

—David Leibowitz, V.P., American Securities Corp.

VIDEOLIVERY

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Canyon Racers	22.95
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Defender	37.95
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Video Olympics	22.95
Breakout	22.95
Home Run	12.95
Basketball	22.95
Football	12.95
Human Cannonball	12.95
Bowling	22.95
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Space Invaders	31.95
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Video Chess	26.95
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Adventure II (Nov.)	37.95
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Vanguard (Dec.)	call
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Activision

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Atlantis	31.95
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Fire Fighter	24.95
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Imagic

Fits Mattel

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Atlantis (Oct.)	34.95
Swords & Sorcerers (Oct.)	34.95
Micro Surgeon	call
Beauty and the Beast	call

Mattel

Master Component	**call**
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ABPA Backgammon	22.95
Checkers	17.95
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Tennis	28.95
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Boxing	32.95
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Bowling	39.95
Basketball	29.95
NFL Football	32.95
Space Battle	32.95
Electric Co. Math Fun	17.95
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NBA Basketball	32.95
Baseball	39.95
Hockey	29.95
Championship Baseball	79.95
Championship Football	79.95
Intellivoice	99.95
PBA Bowling	32.95
Sub-Hunt	32.95
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Astro Smash	32.95
Diuet Trac	59.95
Snafu	32.95
Space Armada	32.95
Arcade (Triple Action)	28.95
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Bomb Squad (Aug.)	43.95
B-17 (Aug.)	43.95
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Odyssey

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Voice Module	89.95
Sid the Spellbinder (Voice)	49.95
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Fits Atari

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Frogger	39.95
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Towering Inferno	call

Apollo

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VIDEO GAMES INTERVIEW

Ken Uston

SCORE! The hardest working man in the video game business is on a roll. Uston turns out tip books faster than you can say Inky, Pinky, Blinky and Clyde.

Ken Uston cuts through life like a tornado across a western plain. Nine years ago, the now 47-year-old Uston (pronounced "Houston"), was senior vice-president at the Pacific Stock Exchange in San Francisco. He was a go-get-'em, three-piece-suit man, a Yale Phi Beta Kappa, M.B.A. from Harvard, and a mathematical and financial whiz kid who had previously leaped past his elders to Director of Operations Research at the Southern New England Telephone Company. Uston then went on to various executive positions on the West Coast, before finally landing at the Exchange. Not yet 40, he seemed to be living every man's dream. In addition to earning $42,500 a year, he was married to an attractive airline stewardess he had met while at Harvard and was the father of three children.

In March, 1974, as recounted in his first book The Big Player, *Uston received a call from a professional gambler who used the pseudonym "Big Al Francesco." By then Uston had divorced his wife, and now he would be taking the first step toward a divorce from his secure, corporate life. He joined Big Al's team of blackjack card counters—players who can gain an edge over the casino by keeping track of the cards from one hand to the next. Casinos appreciate card counters about as much as bars appreciate loudmouth drunks. Hence, counters, like drunks, are often thrown out on their ears and threatened with arrest. However, before Big Al's crew was uncovered by an alert shift manager at the Sands in Las Vegas two years later, it had won approximately a half-million dollars playing blackjack. Uston had become the team's premiere player.*

It was only the beginning. In the next five years, Uston made blackjack his career. Using ever more sophisticated methods to avoid detection, he organized new blackjack teams that are estimated to have netted about $4 million in some 300 casinos from Las Vegas to Macao. At the same time, Uston sued a number of American casinos that barred him from play. Earlier this year he won a major battle before the New Jersey Supreme Court, which ruled unanimously that casinos may not exclude anyone from playing blackjack simply on the basis of his skill. (However, the Supreme Court allowed 90 days for the New Jersey Gaming Commission to come up with appropriate measures to counter the card counters.)

Between jaunts around the world, Uston wrote several books on blackjack, including the monumental Million Dollar Blackjack. *He directed the Uston Blackjack Institute at the Jockey Club in Las Vegas, published a blackjack newsletter, and, eschewing attire any more formal than a sweater and jeans, lobbied from Reno to Atlantic City for what he considers the civil rights of blackjack players.*

Then, in late 1981, a completely new career sprang up for Ken Uston, and it came as suddenly, surprisingly and lucratively as a wildcat oil strike. In a mere four days, he wrote a little opus called Mastering Pac-Man. *Within three weeks of its publication, the book soared to the top of the* New York Times *bestseller list, and immediately led to two more big-selling books—*Score! Beating the Top 16 Video Games *and the 674-page* Guide to Buying and Beating the Home Video Games. *By the end of this year, Uston expects to have two more books on the market—an update of the home video game book and one on home computers. Remarkably, the ultimate blackjack player has become the ultimate authority on video games.*

Though he has a condo in Las Vegas, an apartment in San Francisco and a house in Newport Beach south of Los Angeles (not to mention an office building he bought recently), Uston spent the summer relaxing and "partying non-stop," as he puts it, at the Playboy Hotel and Casino in Atlantic City, while at the same time

Photos by Frank Lusk

monitoring the blackjack rules changes under consideration by the New Jersey Gaming Commission. VIDEO GAMES Contributing Editor Roger Dionne, an old friend of Uston, sometime biographer, drinking partner and Pac-Man opponent, caught up with the video game maven at his Playboy suite in July. Interrupted by phone calls, the arrival of an attractive brunette named Toni, and even a false fire alarm, Uston nevertheless talked at length about the twists and turns of his jet-setter life, and his metamorphosis from business wiz to blackjack expert to his current status as bestselling author and video games guru.

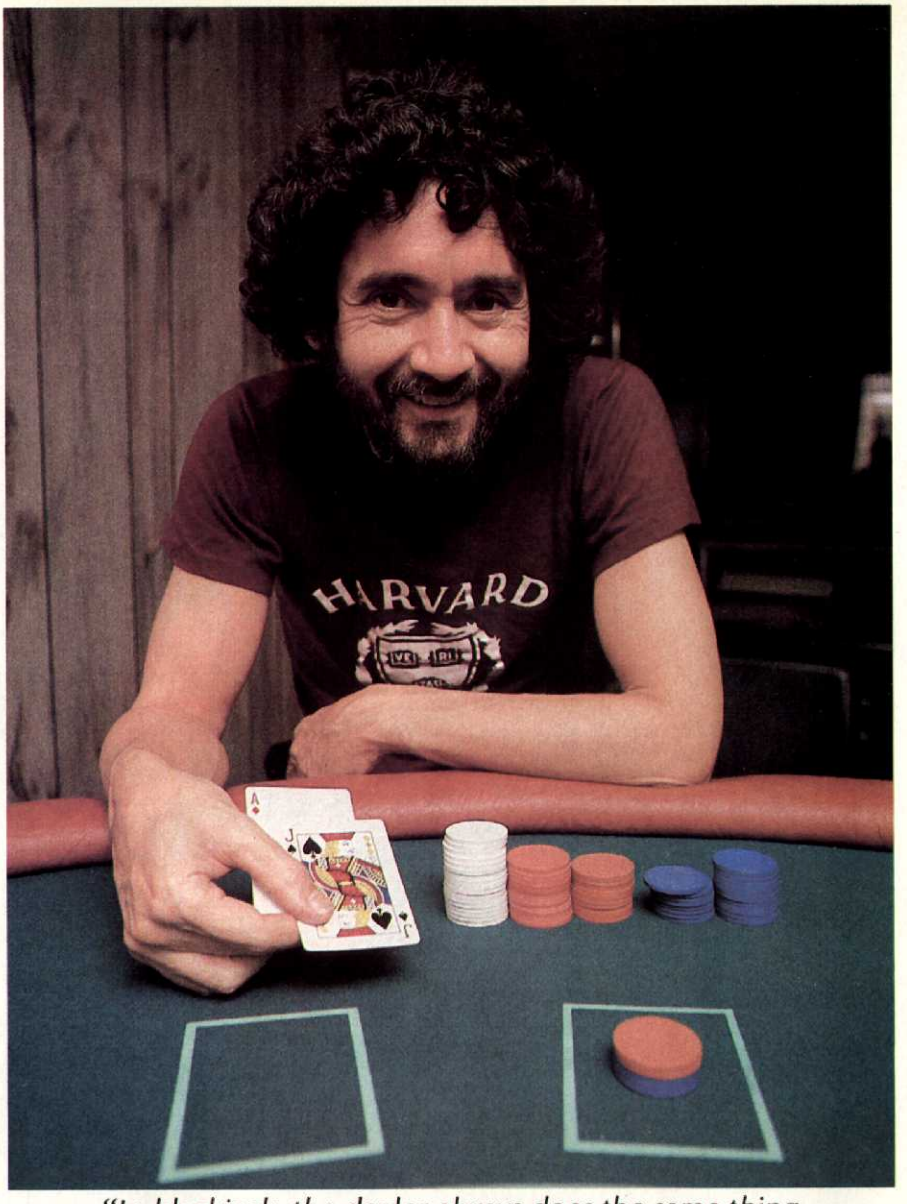
Video Games: When we first met in 1978, you had an Atari VCS (Video Computer System). One of your blackjack teams was in town, and they were down a few thousand dollars. Yet we still managed to play Breakout. My recollection is you beat me pretty soundly.

Uston: My God, that was a long time ago. When you talk about video games, 1978 is prehistoric. But yes, I was hooked on Breakout at the time. I used to play it about two or three hours a day. Before that it was Pong. I always used to beat my buddies at Pong, and I seemed to do pretty well at Breakout too. I think it has to do with the fact that I type and like to play piano, two skills which not only require hand-to-eye coordination, but some kind of finger dexterity.

VG: How did you react when Space Invaders came along?

Uston: Space Invaders came out in the fall of 1979, just before our blackjack team operation got started again. It wasn't long before I was hooked on it too. Then we had a huge, beautiful win here in Atlantic City—$350,000 in ten days in December, '79. It was the nicest win we ever had, and we celebrated by going back to California, renting a house in Newport Beach, and buying a Space Invader machine. That machine was going six or seven hours a day every day.

Then in 1980, Asteroids came out. A lot of my friends got hooked, but I never really liked the game. Asteroids was basically thrust, fire, left, right, sort of a Defender/Stargate kind of hand-to-eye reflex game. I think it was a little too demanding for me. I like games that are more cerebral. Space Invaders was cerebral because you had to count the number of shots, and then you had to know when to get 300 points for the space ships. I was good at that.



"In blackjack, the dealer always does the same thing. In Pac-man, the monsters always move in a predetermined way given how you move. In Ms. Pac-Man, the monsters tend to move randomly, although the more I play the more I'm finding there are definite, predictable patterns. They're just more complicated."

VG: Can you explain what you like about video games? What the appeal is?

Uston: People like challenges. When they see a high score, they want to beat it. Another very important factor is that when you're playing a video game, you forget about your ex-wife, your mortgage, your bills, your job. You forget about everything. As you know, when you're playing Pac-Man, all you think about is that machine.

VG: As long as you mentioned it, how do you explain Pac-Man's extraordinary success?

Uston: Every coin-op manufacturer is asking that same question, and none has come up with the answer yet. Pac-Man is a cute game, plus the controls are so damned simple; You can hold a drink in one hand and play the game with the other hand. Try to do that with Stargate and its seven controls. And even though it's difficult to master Pac-Man, it's not too hard to get moderately good at it in contrast to a

game like Stargate.

VG: Intense video game players like yourself have become very discriminating—liking some more than others. What do you think accounts for that attitude?

Uston: I think video games appeal to two different kinds of people—those who like cerebral, mental kinds of challenges, and those who like fast, hand-to-eye-coordination challenges. For example, I think the people who like to play Pac-Man or Make Trax are quite different from the people who like to play Defender or Stargate. It's like the difference between playing blackjack and craps: One is a mental game, the other is a fast-action game.

VG: You seem to be particularly attracted to games requiring strategy as opposed to games where you're simply reacting to a variety of surprises.

Uston: As a matter of fact, when I played blackjack, people always used to ask me, "Well, how come you don't play backgammon? How come you don't play poker?" Then when I started getting into Pac-Man, people asked, "Why Pac-Man and not some of the others?" And since I enjoy piano playing and working with computers, I finally figured out what the common denominator is. In all of these things I'm using my brain to vie against an opponent with a predictable response. Maybe not an easy response, but a predictable response.

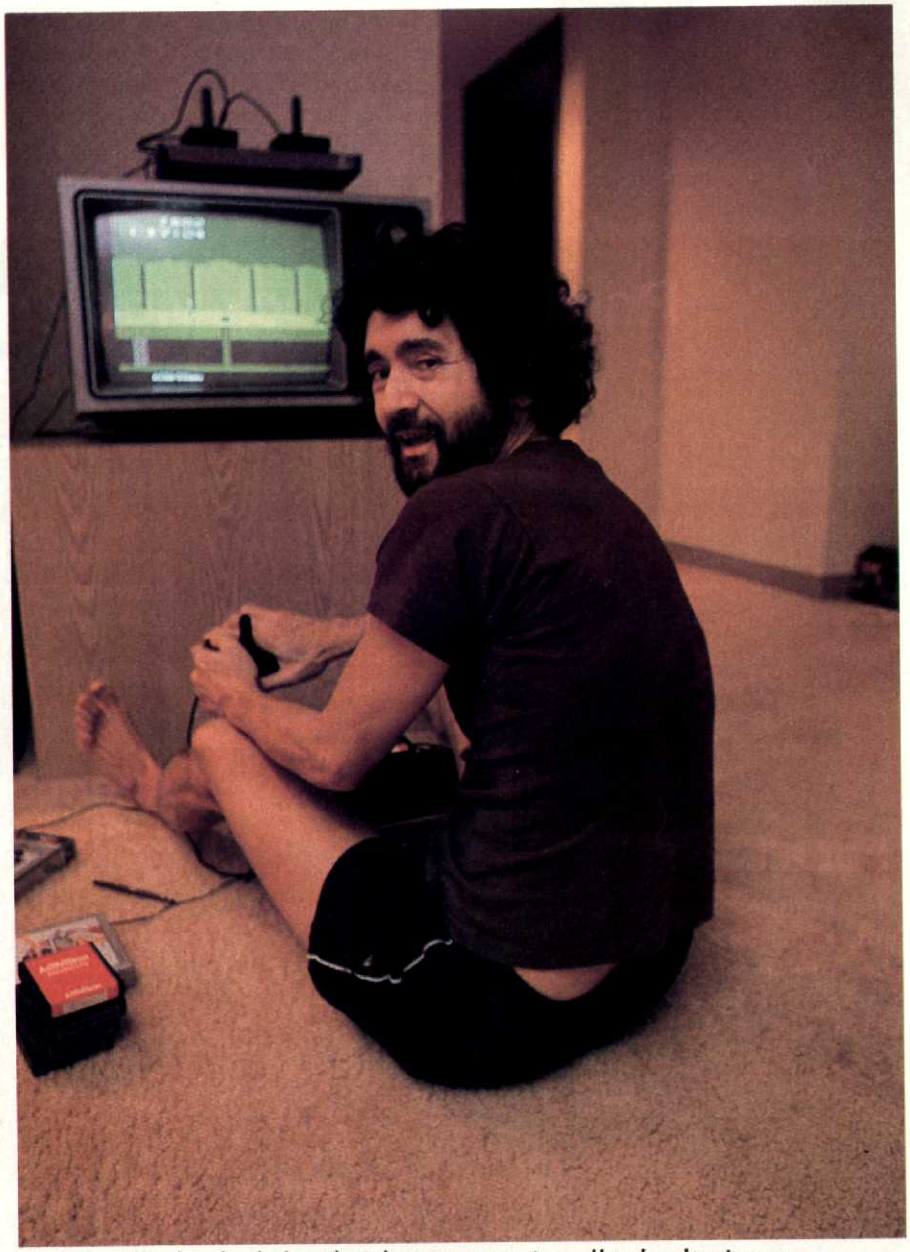
In blackjack, the dealer always does the same thing. In backgammon and poker this isn't true. The human element is involved. In Pac-Man, the monsters will always move in a predetermined way given how you move. In Ms. Pac-Man, the monsters tend to move in a random way, although the more I play Ms. Pac-Man, the more I'm finding there are, in fact, definite, predictable patterns. They're just more complicated.

Piano-playing isn't random either; you play certain chords and arrangements, and as for a computer, if it's programmed correctly and doesn't have any bugs, it always does the same thing. So I think it's this absence of randomness, of the unpredictable, that's the source of my interest in all these things.

VG: How did your involvement with Pac-Man develop to the point where you could write a book (*Mastering Pac-Man*) about it?

Uston: The Playboy Casino opened in '81 and the bunnies there used to hang around a 24-hour club called the Easy Street Pub. The girls were so gorgeous, I used to hang around Easy Street *all the time*. After a while I started playing their Pac-Man machine with a pitboss and two craps dealers from the casino. We all got hooked on the game and started having contests. At one point, I had the high score of 50,000 when the pitboss called me up at four in the morning. "Ken," he said, "I just got 58,000. I beat your record." I leaped out of bed, went down there immediately, and played for about three hours until I reached 70,000.

When it became obvious to me that there were patterns in the game, I diagrammed the board, the dots, the channels and everything else. I xeroxed about 100 copies and started experimenting with these patterns. That's when I developed what I call P1, P2 and P3 in *Mastering Pac-Man*. At the time I wasn't really thinking of a book, I just wanted to master the game and get an edge over everyone. But I couldn't get past the ninth key on the



"I don't defend video games. I really don't give a damn whether they're good or bad. The fact is they're here. I just think it's fun to write about the subject you happen to know a lot about. What the hell, I'm helping these 12-year-old kids save a little money. Arcade operators don't like it, but that's life."

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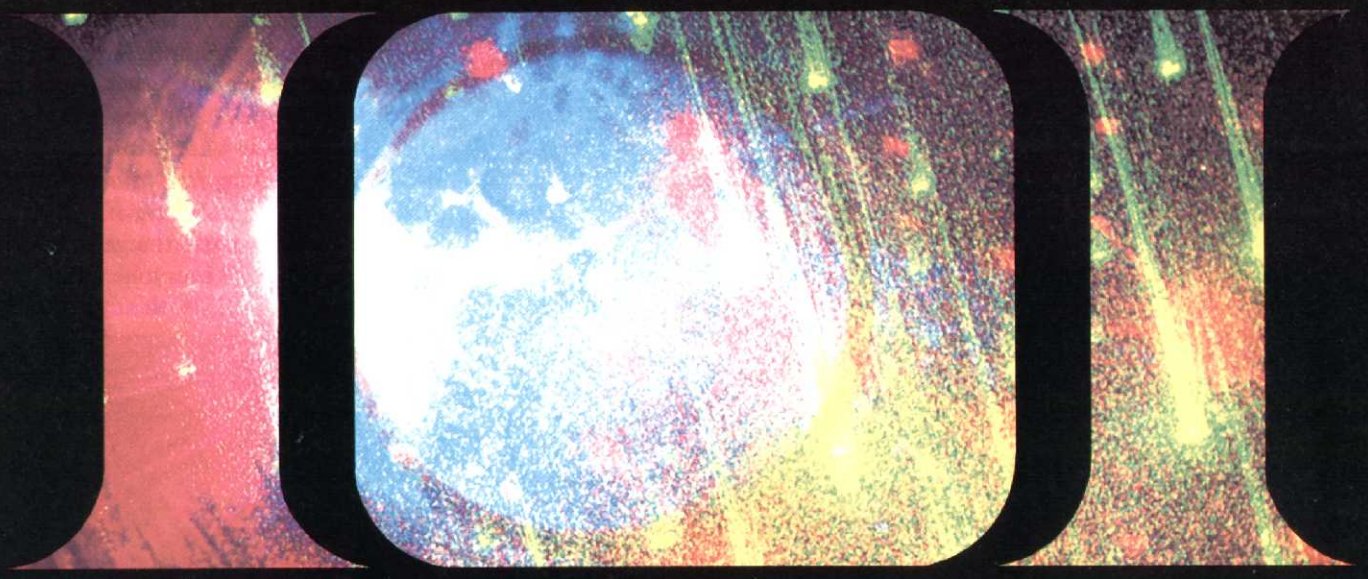

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slow machine or the fourth key on the fast machine. I'd get up to 130,000 or so, but I couldn't go beyond that.

When I went back to San Francisco, I discovered a little Chinese kid named Tommy at the Machine Shop arcade on Broadway getting up to 380,000. I thought, "Wow! What's going on here?" A couple of people had suggested I write a book on Pac-Man, but I felt I didn't really know enough about the game yet. So I started working with Tommy and another Chinese kid named Raymond. Every time I went down to the Machine Shop I learned something new from them, which wasn't easy because they didn't speak English too well. But finally, I mastered that ninth key (or fourth key), and I could get up pretty high. That's when I decided to go ahead and write the book. It took me four days. It's sold about 1.3 million.

VG: I understand the Midway people, who have the copyright on Pac-Man, were not too happy about the book.

Uston: My publisher, New American Library (NAL), wanted permission from Midway to go ahead with the book. Midway's Marketing Vice-President (Stan Jarocki) loved the idea. I had my agent send him a copy and when the President of Midway (Dave Marofske) saw it he said, "This book is *too good*." When I heard that, I saw red. That's what they tell a blackjack player when they throw him out of a casino. It was so ironic, especially coming from a subsidiary of Bally, which has its own casino in Atlantic City. I was so furious, the first thing I did was call the President of Midway. I talked to his secretary and said, *"I am printing that book. I would rather work with you than against you. But the book will be published."* Right after that I went to the expense of having 500 copies printed. As it turned out, I ended up blowing a grand because NAL decided to go ahead with the book anyway.

VG: And Midway took no action when the book came out?

Uston: Absolutely none. About six weeks later, Loeb and Loeb, their lawyers in Los Angeles, initiated letters to Warner, Simon & Schuster and NAL (all of whom have books on Pac-Man), claiming Midway had some kind of a vested interest in these books by virtue of their copyright on Pac-Man. I've let Simon & Schuster fight the legal battle, and recently a judge refused to grant an injunction against the printing of their book (*How to Win at Pac-Man*). That may well mean the lawsuit is dead.

VG: Meanwhile, you came out with two more books on video games. How were you able to research and write them so fast?

Uston: When my editor suggested I write a book on the top 15 coin-op games, I thought to myself, "Well, I know Pac-Man, but I don't know these other games." So I made a deal with my little friend Raymond to join me in New York and help me put this book together. I went to two really grubby arcades near my hotel in New York that had all the games and some really dynamite players. I wrote up one game a day and got the book written in 16 days. (Hence the title, *Score! Beating the Top 16 Video Games*.) Within three weeks NAL had shipped about 400,000 copies.

"The fact that there's only one Pac-Man murder—maybe that's pretty good."

VG: Obviously it didn't take you 181 days to write about all the cartridges that are reviewed in your *Guide to Buying and Beating the Home Video Games*. How did you pull that one off?

Uston: For that book I had a brilliant, fast-talking blackjack groupie I call "Harvard" as my research assistant. We came down here to Playboy, rented a suite, and did nothing for three or four weeks but play the games and write an analysis of each cartridge. We had two typewriters, three televisions and cartridges everywhere. My original goal was to do 80 cartridges, but we kept finding out there were more out there. First, we expanded to 130 cartridges and then eventually to 181. It was a project I never thought I'd finish.

VG: There are some people who argue that the how-to books remove the fun of mastering a game through trial and error. How do you respond to these critics?

Uston: I'm no big crusader or proponent of these how-to books. I just think it's fun to write about the subjects you happen to know a lot about. How are video games books different from books on bridge, blackjack, golf, how to fix your television set, how to build a patio? I get letters, usually from kids under fifteen, saying, "Thank you. Thank you. You're my hero. You've helped me go from a score of 20,000 to a score of 28,000. Can I have your autograph? Could you please write something about Dig Dug. I really like that game and I want to get better at it." The fan mail I get indicates that people really like to read about ways of improving at these games. Of course, a lot of the kick is getting better by yourself. I'd say the criticism is more applicable to the home games, where you don't have to put in a quarter. But as far as the arcade games, I figure, "What the hell. I'm helping these 12-year-old kids save a little money." Arcade operators don't like it, but that's life.

VG: You bring up an interesting point. As you know, there are citizens' groups around the country, trying to enact laws against video arcades. One proposal is to prohibit minors from playing games during school hours. What do you say to that?

Uston: I know some of the arcades are really funky. One of the arcades I was going to in New York was a sleazy place with some real seedy looking characters hanging around. But there are other arcades that are phenomenal. When I went on my promotional tour in April, I saw some clean, cleverly-designed, fun arcades, where they had competitions like the one that gave kids extra game tokens for a good report card from school. Most arcades, I found, absolutely forbid alcohol and swearing on the premises, and prevent kids from playing during school hours. Naturally, they're doing it out of self-interest, but I think the pressure from parents helps keep the arcades respectable.

VG: Other critics say the games are a bad influence on people. They point to incidents like the one in Long Island in June when a fellow got into a fist fight over a Pac-Man game, stormed out of the bar, got a rifle, and ended up killing a college student who just hap-

(Continued on page 71)

PROGRAMMING FOR DOLLARS

There's games in them thar brains. Now take that brilliant idea, write it up on a computer and send it in to a software firm or APX. What's APX? Better read on.

By Dale Archibald

Once upon a time, young Greg Christensen built electronic gizmos like amplifiers and sound generators from scratch. Ready to take on another challenge, he bought an Atari 800 computer with his savings. After Greg taught himself the basics of programming, he decided to have a go at designing a computer game.

Six weeks later, the high school senior had developed Caverns of Mars—a game in which the player flies a spaceship down through the twists and turns of a cavern while battling enemy craft and blowing up fuel dumps. Why not, he thought, send the program to the Atari Program Exchange (APX) in Sunnyvale, Calif. and see what happens?

Two months later, Greg received a call from an Atari executive who raved about Caverns of Mars. Not only did APX accept it, the company wanted permission to market the game as one of its upcoming products. In the fall of 1981, Caverns won an APX contest. The prize: $3,000.

Now an 18-year-old college freshman, Greg received his first quarterly royalty check this summer—for $18,000! Atari has told him he might eventually earn as much as $100,000 in royalties from Caverns of Mars.

Greg Christensen is not alone. The video game boom has spawned its own breed of Horatio Algers. Though selling a game is a long shot, the combination of an inspired idea, the right technical know-how and a few helpful contacts is sometimes all it takes to strike it rich in computerland. And, contrary to popular belief, you don't need a degree in computer science or decades of experience in the field in order to make your break. In fact, says David Lubar, a 27-year-old game designer who writes Atari VCS-compatible programs for Sirius Software, "There are very few programmers I can go out to drink with." Most of his associates happen to be under 21.

Okay, so you have an idea for a game. How do you get started on your road to fame and fortune?

The consensus among industry veterans is that cooperation—unlike Christensen's solo effort—is the key. Just as there are thousands of "idea people" who haven't the faintest knowledge about programming, many a programmer wouldn't recognize an imaginative game if it struck him like an asteroid. Explains Lubar: "It's just like you have people who can write great lyrics, but can't write a melody. I think partnerships and teams are going to become more common in the future."

Lubar is talking strictly from experience when he says, "The day of the game designer in a vacuum is over." Sitting in a lab crowded with computer equipment at Sirius' Sacramento (Calif.) headquarters, the 27-year-old philosophy major and former freelance writer lays out his thoughts on ideas.

"An idea by itself, as opposed to a program, is not a good way to go. Although a good idea can be valuable, ideas are cheap—really. An idea in the form of a program—even if it needs work—is more valuable to us than just a raw idea."

Since most companies won't even look at a game idea unless it is presented in a computer language, Lubar suggests that "idea people" join forces with technical experts. One of the best places to do such "networking" is at computer clubs, he says.

If this doesn't work out, however, you might want to draw up a series of sketches that show how the game will unfold. This process—known as storyboarding—is a standard practice in film and video and is becoming more popular among game designers. "First of all, this shows a little more professionalism," Lubar advises, "and second, gives a better visual representation. The visual aspect is really the name of the game."

But wait a minute—how did David Lubar figure all of this out? Wasn't he a writer/philosopher in another lifetime three short years ago? The California programmer leans back in his chair and flashes a broad smile. "After graduating from Rutgers (in New Jersey) I began writing fiction," he recounts. "One of the first stories I sold was to *Creative Computing*. At the

Illustration by Ron Logan

time I had never even read the magazine. Well, I went and bought a copy and soon enough I was hooked on computers.

"Mostly because I was into games, I became totally enthralled with the concept of owning an Apple. When I bought one, I really wasn't thinking about programming. But then I discovered it was a lot of fun."

Lubar became a fanatic. By studying books and magazines and conducting his own experiments, he learned how to write graphics programs and work on small graphics utilities. Then, in 1980, he was hired by *Creative Computing,* where he wrote prolifically until Sirius contacted him last February.

"As it turned out, I wanted to devote full-time to programming and write more as a hobby," explains Lubar, whose first game Worm War I, distributed by Fox Video Games, should hit the stores early in the fall. "The opportunity to work at Sirius on the VCS was exactly what I was looking for."

* * *

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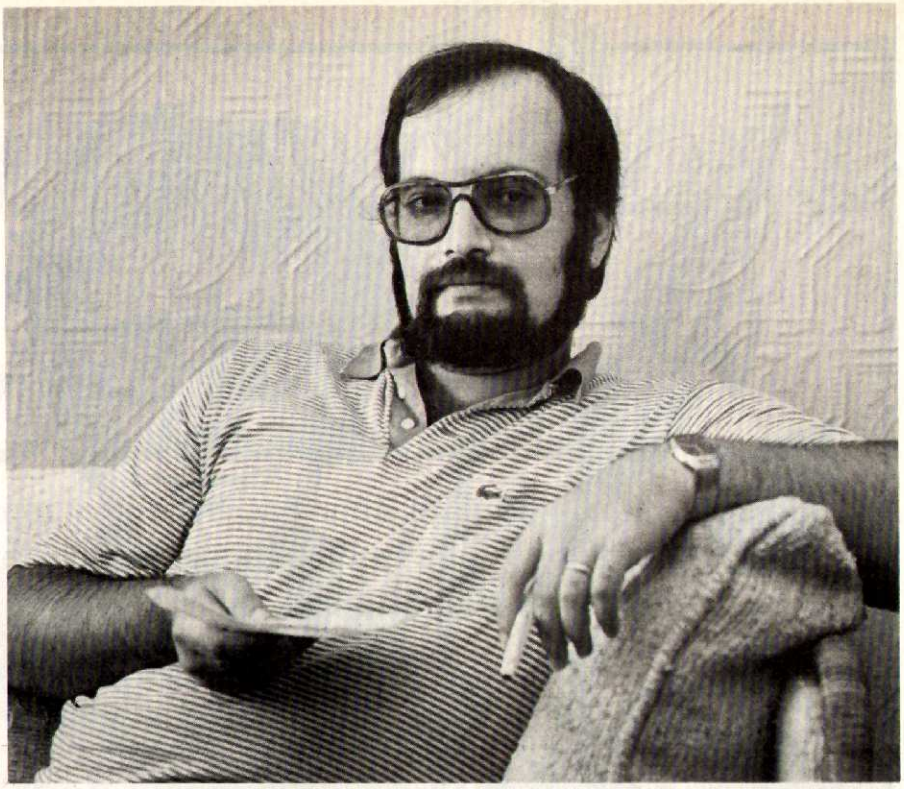
—Strategic Simulations' advertisement

SSI President Joel Billings says his company gets "all kinds of things" as a result of this type of ad. "We're mostly looking for programs. We can't do a whole lot with ideas because we only have two in-house programmers. About 80 percent of our games come from outside."

First, though, the designer must make contact with SSI. "What we will do if they have a product they want to submit is send them a non-disclosure agreement (a guarantee that the company will protect the submission with the same degree of confidentiality as its own proprietary products). They have to sign it and send it back along with a copy of the game and a rough draft of the rules. At that point we play the game."



Photos by Victoria Rouse

LET'S GET SIRIUS: Apple fanatic David Lubar recently gave up writing fiction for programming. At 27, he's already an old-timer in the brave new world of computers.

SSI then tests the program on either an Apple, Atari 800 or TRS-80 computer and tries to get back to the author within a week. Generally, whenever the designer is given a go-ahead, he is asked to make numerous alterations. "We'll suggest changes on all kinds of things—graphics, gameplay, whatever," says Billings. SSI also supplies the designer with a few computer subroutines which helps to speed up his programming chores.

As in book publishing, pay is based on a royalty scale—from 10 to 20 percent of the net revenue. But unlike the book-publishing process, SSI's designers usually don't see cash up front. The game must first be published, at which point the designer receives the minimum percentage. Once sales reach a certain level, the percentage increases.

There are other ways, Billings admits, to get your foot inside SSI's door. Occasionally he'll match up an "idea person" with one of the firm's royalty authors. (In such cases, the royalty agreement is hashed out by both parties.) Billings also hires programmers specifically to convert existing games for other machines into Atari Software. "It's really like taking the rulebook and writing another program from scratch," he notes. Incidentally, converters earn 50 to 75 percent of the total royalty.

Strategic Simulations, however, isn't the only software house reaching out for help. "Wanted: Software Authors!" screams Broderbund's ad. "If you have a product for the micro market, let us show you the advantages of working with our team of design, production and distribution specialists."

Broderbund, founded in 1980 by Doug and Gary Carlston, is one of the fastest-growing software outfits in the burgeoning computer arcade game business. A game designer of the first order, Doug maintains there are three essential ingredients when it comes to programming: creativity, machine language programming ability, and a strong artistic bent in computer graphics or animation.

"We're not only looking for a program that is publishable," he maintains, "but for programmers who will be able to work with us. We have strong opinions about what the market wants and needs. When we find someone who's willing to work with us, we get very excited. We'll make an offer on the phone and send a contract off the same day."

On an average day, five programs turn up in Broderbund's mail pouch. At this point, they undergo what Carlston describes as a kind of triage. In other words, some survive, most don't. Only two percent of the victims make it through the company's rigorous testing procedure.

But when the right program comes along, Broderbund gets down to business. The designer is free to accept a royalty plan similar to SSI's or a lump sum in the neighborhood of $15,000 once the game is completed. Interestingly, Carlston reports that no one has ever taken the company up on the cash offer. It seems that almost every designer has been better off collecting royalties.

And what about ideas? Carlston couldn't be more blunt when he says, "We have a stockpile of ideas and not enough good graphics programmers to program them. We will only look at fully implemented programs."

* * *

We'd like the opportunity to look at well-written software you've created for Atari home computers. We'll send you a quarterly payment for programs accepted by APX . . .

—Atari Program Exchange Software Catalog

Here's even more bad news for you "idea people." As noted above, Atari welcomes game designers. But the company just won't touch an idea. Warns APX general manager Fred Thorlin: "When someone sends in an idea, as soon as we recognize that that's what it is, we don't even read it. We'll send it over to legal and they may send back an idea submission form (this essentially frees Atari of any liability if a similar idea happens to already be under development in-house), and it goes through a completely different mill.

"If you're not committed enough to the idea to implement it," he adds, "then we're not interested in it."

But let's assume you *are* committed enough to your idea to develop it for the Atari 400 or 800, and you have a program. Contact Atari and ask for the APX Program Author's Handbook and the APX Submission Materials. The handbook includes suggestions on how to prepare your program, what your program should be about, generally how it should operate, how to document it, and some helpful hints on the coding procedure.

When the idea is submitted, the first thing APX staffers do is look for the signature on the bottom of the submission form. If that's not there, back it goes. Explains Thorlin: "The paperwork has got to be square."

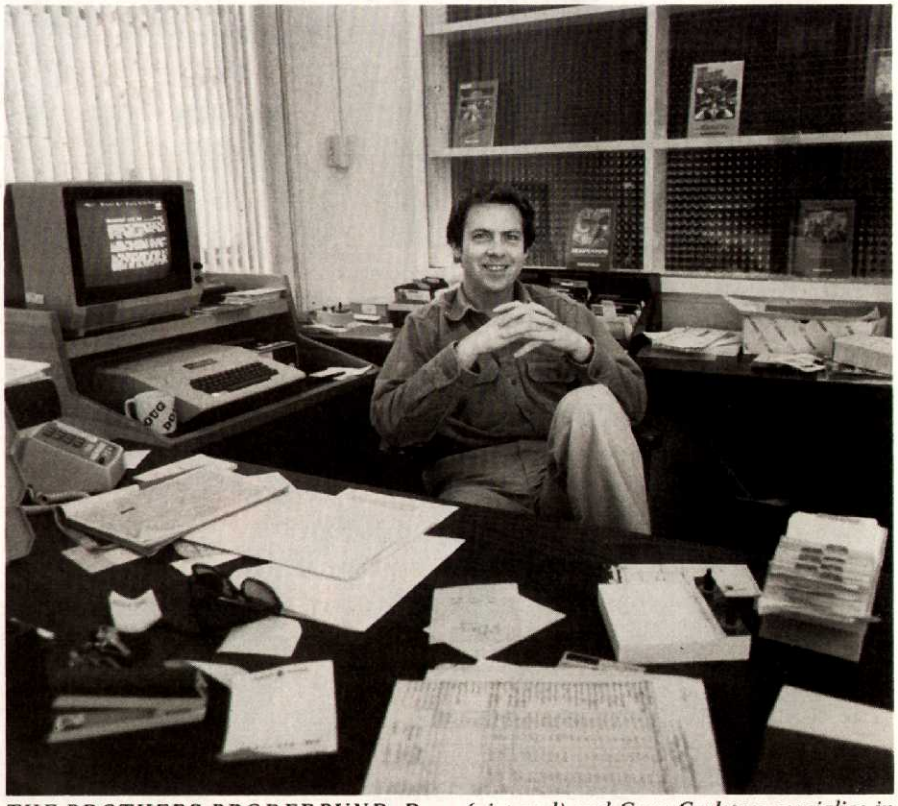
After testing, rejected programs are returned within 60 days from the time they came in. Accepted programs are accorded significantly better treatment. Some polish is added to the program, and a description is written up to be included in the next catalog. ("This game is sensational!" is but one of the superlatives that describes Caverns of Mars.) APX pays a 10 percent quarterly royalty. The deal is nonexclusive, meaning the designer can sell it elsewhere—often for more money—even while it's being sold through APX. *(Continued on page 71)*

Four Slick Tips for Computer Arcaders

What does it take to write a successful computer arcade game? Broderbund's Doug Carlston should know. His company has published its share of arcade-type hits, including Apple Panic and Snoggle. Here are four of Carlston's basic rules:

- The game should have increasing levels of difficulty.
- There should be plateaus for the player to reach, each with a qualitative difference. In Broderbund's popular Choplifter, the first enemy is tanks. Next comes a battle with tanks *and* jet fighters. After that, you're confronted by tanks, fighters, *and* smart bombs and so on.
- When the player suffers a defeat, it should be the result of something he did or didn't do. Never escalate the difficulty simply by programming in random events that a person can't respond to.
- The program should project a personality. One way to accomplish this is by identifying objects rather than by working with abstract shapes. This, Carlston insists, is the key to sustaining people's interest.

—*D. A.*



THE BROTHERS BRODERBUND: Doug (pictured) and Gary Carlston specialize in converting arcade themes into computer games. They're not only looking for programs that are publishable, but people they can work with.

PLIMPTON G
MATTEL

THE SELLING OF INTELLIVISION

By Susan Prince

Avis, Pepsi and Mattel have one thing in common: They all try harder. But trying harder gets to be trying after awhile. Pete Pirner, senior vice president of marketing at Mattel Electronics, knows the feeling.

"We make a better game than Atari—pure and simple," he says boldly, referring to his company's Intellivision and the competition's Video Computer System (VCS). "Atari just happened to have gotten a three-year head start in the marketplace and was able to build up a larger installed base faster. That doesn't necessarily make them a better game company."

The fierce product and advertising battle lines were drawn last December and the resulting war between the two TV-game giants has become legend among videophiles. Mattel launched the first salvo with a $6 million-plus pre-Christmas television ad campaign featuring professional dilettante George Plimpton. In comparing the Atari VCS with Intellivision, Plimpton announced that the Mattel

Illustration by Andy Probert

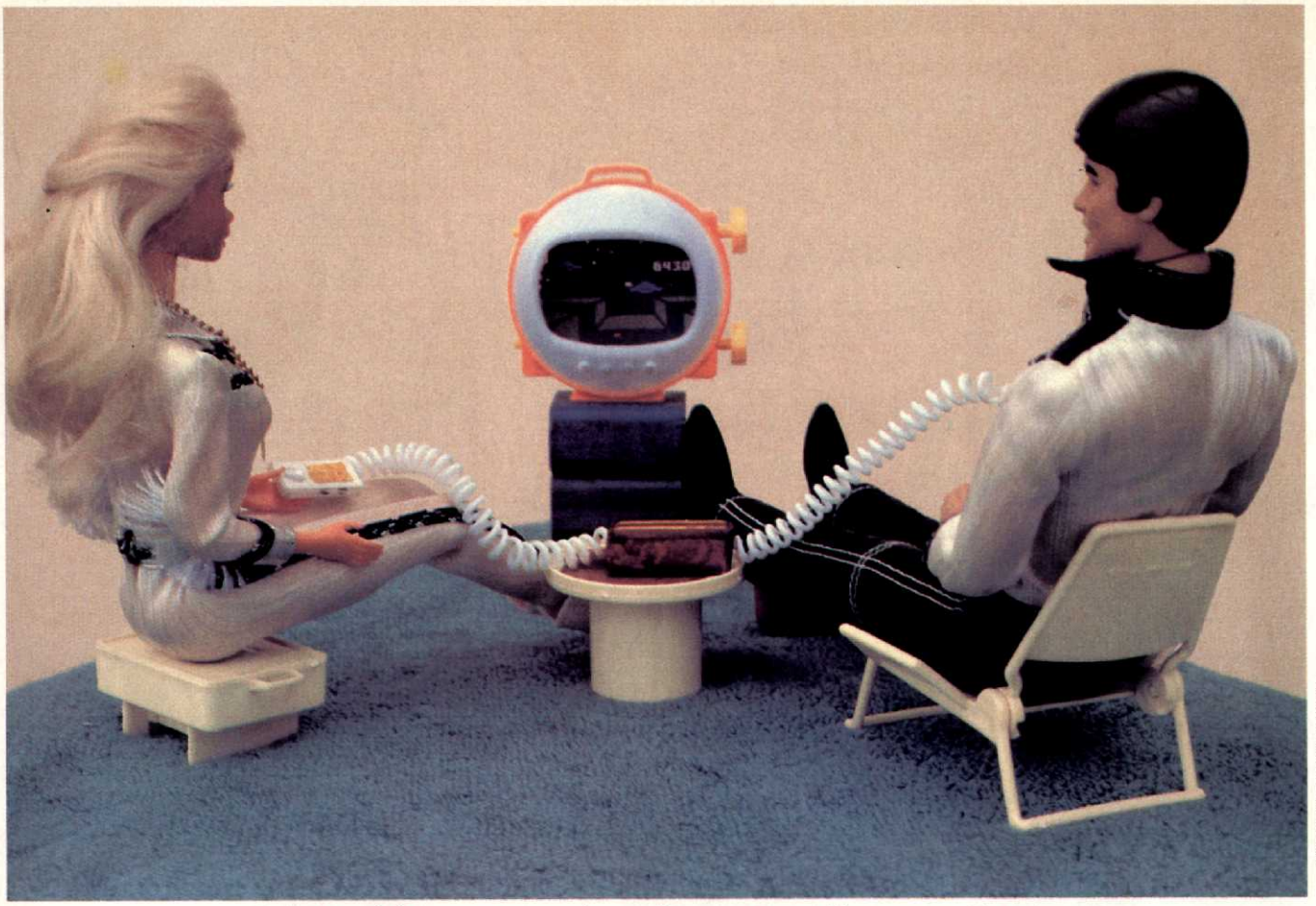


Photo by Sarah Longacre

"It's World War III out there," says Mattel's Pirner. "We're prepared to hit Atai wherever their underbelly is the softest." Is this any way for the maker of Barbie and Ken to act?

system is "more like the *real* thing."

Atari counterattacked with a Poindexter-lookalike calling himself "an intelligent consumer" who simply wanted to compare Atari's Asteroids, Missile Command and Warlords with other companies' offerings. To his dismay, he found the others did not make those particular types of games. "*Nobody* compares to Atari," Poindexter was forced to conclude.

Blip! Back to Mattel, which sallied forth with an ad featuring its own version of the Atari nerd. After the nerd mimicked Atari's line ("When it comes to space games, *nobody* compares to Atari"), Plimpton suddenly appeared, informing the obviously misinformed adolescent about Intellivision's Space Battle, Space Armada and Astrosmash games. "Gee, I didn't know that," the kid slobbered.

When Atari complained about this ad to all three television networks, NBC and ABC canned both companies' spots, while CBS continued to run Mattel's version. But that was last year. With more game companies vying for Mattel's moderate share of the TV-game, the Madison Avenue action won't be nearly so gentlemanly this time around.

Says Pirner: "It's World War III out there. We're spending a lot of money [over $20 million, double the '81 budget]. We're prepared to go with comparative advertising if we find it's necessary. We'll be hitting them (Atari) wherever their underbelly is softest."

Does all this sound a little harsh, especially coming from the maker of Barbie dolls? "It's a tough market," explains Josh Denham, president of Mattel Electronics. "You've got to compete to stay alive and to keep your shelf space in the stores. There is a fairly narrow funnel at the retail level."

Now a $1.13 billion a year corporation, Mattel was just a gleam in the eyes of Ruth and Elliot Handler back in 1946. The husband-and-wife team (he's an artist) moved from Denver to southern California that year and wound up designing and manufacturing plastic doll furniture. As television began stitching itself into the fabric of American life in the '50s, the Handlers were busily taking notes. By 1955, Mattel—risking a substantial sum to sponsor the Mickey Mouse Club—became the first toy company to advertise on national TV.

But early products like an automatic paper cap-firing toy rifle and the musical Jack-in-the-Box were only the beginning for the Los Angeles-based firm. In 1957, Mrs. Handler noticed that her young daughter Barbara was having a good deal of fun dressing and redressing paper dolls in all the latest paper "fashions." Accordingly, Mattel then gave birth to Barbie—the first grown-up doll with real, changeable clothing. The new "mature" look in dolls became the rage—first among young girls, then among boys as Ken strutted into toy stores. Mattel prospered.

The mid-to-late '60s brought a broad range of Mattel toys to market, some

(Continued on page 68)

Nobody Compares to George Plimpton

*Long before author and now actor (*Reds*) George Plimpton began pitching Mattel's Intellivision on prime time, he had built a reputation as the Walter Mitty of sports, living out every man's fantasy to be a professional athlete at least for one day. In* Paper Lion *(which was made into a movie starring Alan Alda as Plimpton), Plimpton observed the world of football while trying to make it as a quarterback with the Detroit Lions. (He played five downs in an intrasquad scrimmage, fumbling twice, falling down once, running once for no gain and throwing an incomplete pass.) His subsequent experiments, including a five-minute exhibition stint as a hockey goalie and a crack at stand-up comedy at Caesar's Palace, were detailed at length in books and magazines like* Sports Illustrated *and* Playboy. *Just how did George Plimpton come to be the Karl Malden of the TV-game ad war? VIDEO GAMES asked fellow writer and sportsman Stephen Hanks to find out. Hanks caught up with Plimpton at his summer home in the Hamptons where he was partying and working on his next non-fiction book, titled* Fireworks.

VIDEO GAMES: Certainly, Mattel could have selected a "real" athlete to be its television spokesperson—say, Reggie Jackson, Tug McGraw or Mean Joe Greene—but they picked you. Why was that?

PLIMPTON: I guess it was because of my image as the ultimate participant. I've tried playing a lot of sports on a professional level, and I've achieved a certain amount of credibility as someone who's always in pursuit of excellence. Mattel probably felt people would believe me when I explained the differences between Mattel and Atari games.

VG: Were you familiar with the games at the time?

PLIMPTON: Not really. But there's such a thing as truth in advertising, so I had to play a lot of Mattel and Atari games before I could go on the air.

VG: Then you really do prefer Intellivision?

PLIMPTON: Definitely. If I hadn't found the Mattel games better, I wouldn't have done the commercials. I really believe very strongly that Mattel's games—especially the sports games—are superior to Atari's.

VG: How do you account for the tremendous success and popularity of video games?

PLIMPTON: They're just great fun! I think their 21st century, three-dimensional look and feel is extremely attractive to people. I have to admit that I'm in awe of the imaginative people who invent and engineer these games.

VG: How long do you think the craze will last?

PLIMPTON: I definitely don't think it's a craze. Any game that is entertaining will last in some form or another, whether it be Pac-Man, Space Invaders, Parcheesi or Monopoly.

VG: Speaking of Pac-Man, do you play it often?

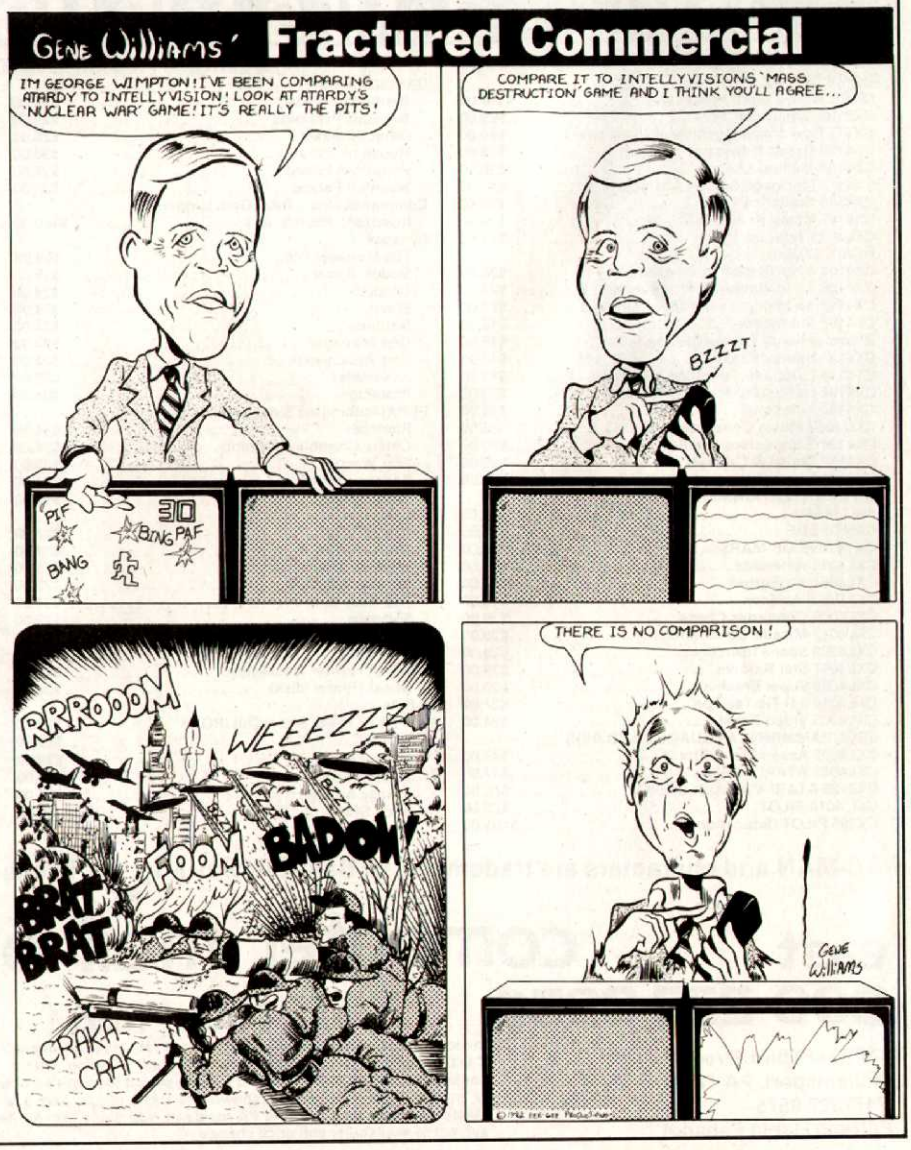
PLIMPTON: Well, I must admit, I really don't play any of the games much and I haven't played Pac-Man at all.

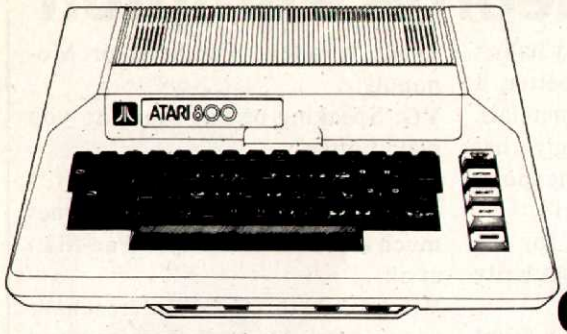
VG: I would think you'd almost have to avoid Pac-Man to have not played it.

PLIMPTON: Well, anytime I pass an arcade and want to play it, there's always someone ahead of me at the machine. But Hugh Hefner has a big gameroom at the Playboy Mansion, and if there's a Pac-Man machine free the next time I'm there, I'll play it. Besides, at Hef's you don't have to put any quarters in.

VG: You must find the time to play

(Continued on page 82)





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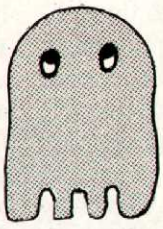

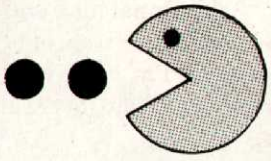

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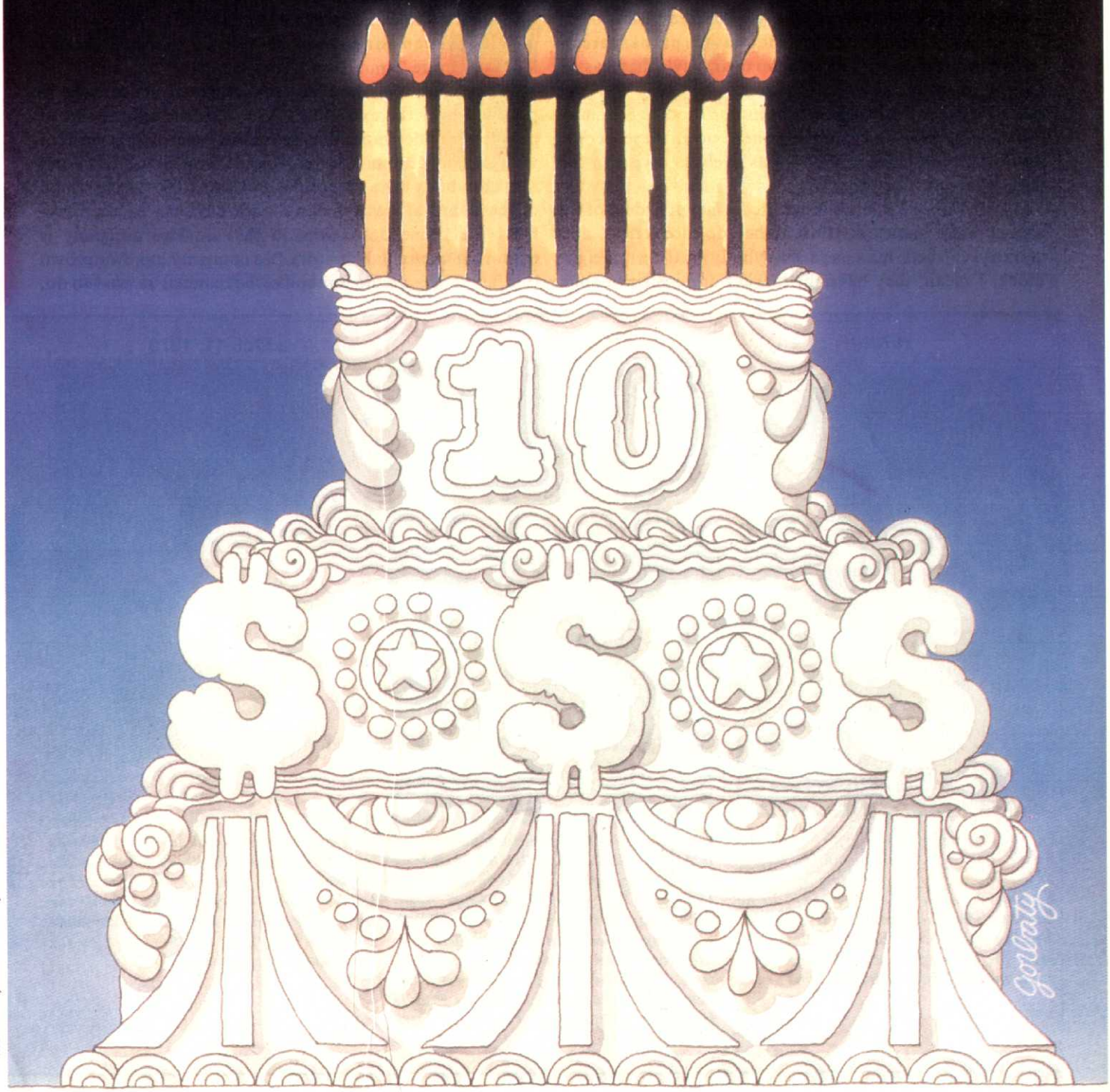


Illustration by Norman Gorbaty

The incredible, incredible story of Atari—
from a $500 lark to a $2 billion business in 10 short years.

By Steve Bloom, editor of *VIDEO GAMES*

Original Atari Man

It began with one cherry tomato and quickly escalated into a full-scale food fight. As an assortment of leftovers splattered about the room, you could feel the Chief Executive's temperature rising. Minutes passed before he could get everyone's attention. Fear suddenly gripped the participants, and the room settled to a hush. Revealing no emotion whatsoever, he exclaimed: "Nolan would be proud." The Chief Executive smiled. Then the food fight resumed.

Ray Kassar, Atari's Chief Executive Officer and chairman of the board, was referring to Nolan Bushnell, his predecessor. There is no small irony here since Bushnell not only founded Atari 10 years ago, but was the primary architect of Atari's legendary, unorthodox workstyle that Kassar has tried so hard to change in the past three years. Working at Atari used to be like one continuous food fight, many former employees say; laboring there now, these people would have you believe, is about as lively as a visit to the county morgue.

Explains Gene Lipkin, the caustic former president of the coin-operated games division: "They do nice letters, and they answer their mail, and everybody is there at eight o'clock. I mean, they have the market on pinstriped suits today. There are more pinstriped suits walking around Atari then there are on the rest of this planet."

Bob Brown, an ex-engineering supervisor who started with the company back in 1974, describes his thoughts after a recent visit to Atari: "Ray and everybody looked stoic and conservative, very three-piece suitish. So many people have come and gone that there was hardly anybody I knew anymore."

Then what explained Kassar's animated behavior as he presided over the executive's food fight? "I think a lot of people misunderstand him" says Don Osborne, the current vice-president for marketing in the coin-op division. "I don't think anybody has any idea what it's like to be the chairman of the board of Atari. I don't think anybody can comprehend the tremendous demand that is. This company is exploring uncharted territory. No company has ever grown this fast. There are no textbooks that can tell us what to do,

1970

In the beginning there was Computer Space. This was Nolan Bushnell's version of the popular computer game Spacewar. He worked on it all through 1970 in his daughter's bedroom and then sold it to Bill Nutting Associates. Says Nutting: "We blew the coin-op industry's mind." The company only built 1,500 of them.

Nov. 29, 1972

Then there was Pong. Nutting didn't want it, Midway didn't either, so Bushnell took the $500 in royalties he'd made off of Computer Space and started Atari. Needless to say, Pong was a monster. Every company copied it, including Allied Leisure where Gene Lipkin was working at the time. "Nolan would roll over fresh if he hears this," say Lipkin, "but our Paddle Battle was a better game."

Oct. 11, 1973

The original video maze game, Gotcha was Atari's fourth effort (Space Race was the second, Pong Doubles the third). The above photo was reproduced from the original brochure. They just don't make 'em like they used to. (See page 48 for an interesting comparison.)

and so we are really blazing the way. That's a very unusual experience."

To which Lipkin, Osborne's former boss, replies: "They inherited a rocket and they're all hanging on for dear life."

At a time when America's industrial giants of the past like General Motors and U.S. Steel are crying the recession blues, that rocket keeps hurtling along at a record clip. Atari's stats tell the story: Each of the last four years the company has doubled its revenues—from $165 million in 1979 to a projected $2 billion figure this year. Atari now accounts for approximately two-thirds of its parent company, Warner Communications Inc.'s total profits.

Ten years ago, Atari was a garage-shop operation that attracted some of the best and the brightest talent in California's high-tech corridor of commerce, Silicon Valley. They wore blue jeans and sneakers and smoked pot and drank kegs full of beer while creating an industry no one thought was possible. Many of these people feel that they shared a unique moment in time during those early years and that Atari has changed drastically since they have left. That, of course, is to be expected of former employees. But these ex-Atarians do have some interesting stories to tell.

THE DYNAMIC DUO: Nolan Bushnell (right) and Joe Keenan, circa 1974.

In the six years that have passed since Warner took the floundering video game company off Bushnell's hands for a mere $32 million, much has transpired. The one thing though that all can agree upon is that Warner's gamble has paid off. "I think you can say that Atari was the buy of the century," says Brown. "I don't know of any other better deal than that."

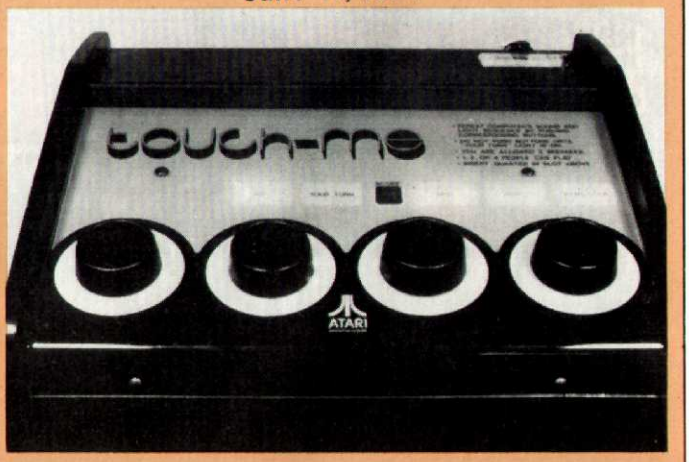
The Saga Begins

Bob Brown was introduced to the grandaddy of all video games, Spacewar, in 1969, several years after Nolan Bushnell had started playing it at the University of Utah. Brown was fascinated by what he saw: a ballet of white figures dancing across the stage of a CRT screen. But he had no idea what to do with it. "How do you sell a $20,000 game system?" Brown wondered. "It just didn't make sense to me that there was a market for games. Nolan showed there was. It was one of his wild visions."

Mar. 4, 1974

After Super Pong came Quadrapong. What's interesting is that this was essentially the same game as Elimination, which was created by Kee Games, Joe Keenan's company. Bushnell and Keenan decided that the best way to reach the most distributors was to design and manufacture similar games but under different names. The first experiment of this sort was Rebound (Atari) and Spike (Kee). The key distinction between the two was a "spike" button Spike had. According to Steve Bristow, the designer, "If you timed it right you could do a real killer spike."

June 11, 1974



Touch Me followed Grand Track 10/Formula K, Atari's first driving games, and World Cup Football into the arcades. Most people probably know Touch Me as Simon. Atari also came out with a hand-held Touch Me to rival Simon some years later. The last batch of Pong games came next—Pin-Pong, which was video pinball, and the inimitable Doctor Pong (aka, Puppy Pong). That's right, folks. Someone at Atari had the bright idea to put Pong in a cabinet shaped like Snoopy's doghouse. Bristow explains: "The idea was to put it in a doctor's waiting room and set it on free play. We put it out, but doctors didn't want to pay for it. I understand Schulz wasn't crazy about it either."

Just about that time the price of integrated circuits began to plummet. Bushnell, by now, had moved to California, taken a job in Ampex's advanced technology division and, in his spare time, had started designing a system that could accommodate Spacewar. Dubbed Computer Space, he sold the prototype to Bill Nutting Associates, a relatively unknown arcade games manufacturer. Since few people had ever seen a video game before, marketing Computer Space was tough.

"We blew the whole coin-op industry's mind," Nutting recalls. "We built 1,500 and had to sell some by force. At the '71 A.M.O.A. (Amusement & Music Operators Association) show there was a few attempts to copy us. Then, the next year Nolan started Atari and came out with Pong. The business simply exploded."

What Nutting fails to mention is the fact that he and Bushnell had had a falling out over Pong. Bushnell, who was chief engineer at Nutting then, wanted a bigger piece of the action for Pong. Nutting refused. "I didn't like his deal," he says. "The kind of royalties Nolan was asking didn't seem fair to me. But, as they say, hindsight is 20-20."

Out of a job, Bushnell reminded Ted Dabney, a former Ampex colleague, that they had once planned on starting a company some day. With the $500 in royalties Bushnell earned from Computer Space, they founded Syzygy. However, when they were informed by the Office of the Secretary of State that they were not the only would-be entrepreneurs fascinated by this celestial image (the moon, sun and earth in a straight line), Bushnell and Dabney rechristened the company Atari—after the check move in the Oriental game Go.

FOUR: Bushnell, Keenan, former coin-op president Joe Robbins and some guy in crazy-looking pants at Pebble Beach. Keenan calls Bushnell "the Henry Ford of the video game business."

What's in a name? In this case, plenty. If Syzygy foretold Atari's present three-division corporate alignment of coin-operated games, consumer electronics and personal computers, Atari was an even brasher prognostication. As Bushnell likes to say, Atari is a polite warning to your competition that it is about to be engulfed.

Nov. 4, 1974

Tank was the next true milestone in Atari's history. Who invented it, however, is a matter of opinion. Some credit Lyle Rains, who was the engineering v.p. in coin-op until only recently, but Bristow says it was he who came up with the concept. (For you VCS fans, Tank is Combat.) "I was working on it when I hired Lyle," he recalls, "Then I gave it to him and he finished it. A lot of the implementation was his, but the original idea was mine." Both agree that Tank carried Atari through 1975.

June 6, 1975

Anti-Aircraft hit the streets only a month after Tank II. The object of the game was pretty similar to Missile Command—blow planes out of the sky with cannon fire. Even the fire buttons were similar. (Sorry, no Trak Ball yet.) Actually, it has more in common with the Air-Sea Battle cartridge.

The Stories of Pong

Almost five months to the day of Atari's incorporation—June 27, 1972—Pong was unveiled at the annual trade gathering in Chicago. Like so many of Atari's products to come, the work on Pong was a team effort in which only one member of the team received credit. In this case, it was Bushnell. Yet "King Pong," as he was quickly dubbed by the press, readily admits to this fraud, joking: "I get the credit because I have more access to the press."

The victim of this little power play was Al Alcorn, a green engineer who had just graduated from the University of California at Berkeley. Bushnell knew Alcorn from Ampex where he had been on a work-study program and hired him as the company's first full-time engineer. His initial project was Pong.

Peking Atari Man

"Nolan defined a Ping-Pong game that could be played on a TV screen," Alcorn recalls. "He defined it, and I built it, though there were little things like the sound that I added to it."

Joe Keenan, who was president of Atari from 1974 to 1978, calls Bushnell the Henry Ford of the video game business and rightly so. "Henry Ford didn't invent the automobile," he says, "but generations of schoolchildren think he did, and that's what counts."

Another case in point is Atari's first consumer product, which was also Pong. Bob Brown explains: "I got to talking about Pong with an engineer friend of mine named Harold Lee, who was working in coin-op. I really wanted to do a consumer product so I asked him whether we could put Pong on a chip. It would be a dedicated home

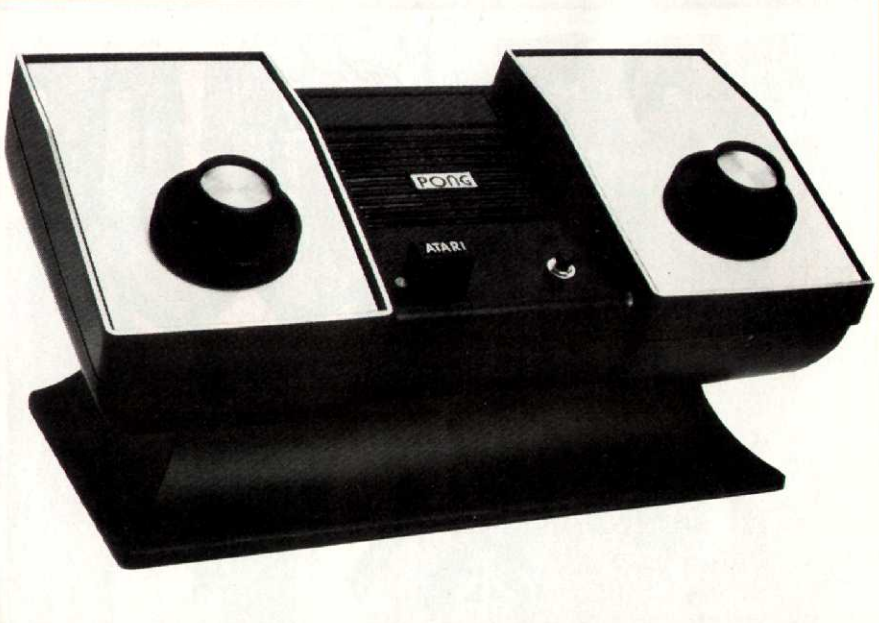
Photo by Victoria Rouse

THE AMPEX CONNECTION: Bushnell hired Al Alcorn as Atari's first full-time engineer. His first project was Pong. Says Alcorn: He (Bushnell) defined it and I built it."

Sept. 25, 1975

Ah, the good-old days when you could base a game on a movie and not have to pay for the rights to it. Atari had Shark Jaws, someone else had Killer Shark and there were probably a few more variations on the theme. Atari advertised it as "exciting underwater video terror . . . Gulp!"

Xmas, 1975



Three years after creating a coin-op video game industry, Atari went home again . . . naturally. And what better game to entice the video player with than Pong. "We went into production with the idea of selling 50,000 units," says Bob Brown, one of the instigators of the project. "We ended up doing double that in the Christmas '75 season. People were waiting two hours in line to sign up on a list just to get a Pong game."

game for TV that would essentially be like the coin-op Pong. He said it could be done, and then we sold Atari on the idea."

Consumer sales and marketing was an entirely new direction for a company with deep coin-op roots like Atari. Distribution would be the key, and Atari didn't have any on the retail level. Atari needed help and found it in the form of Sears Roebuck & Co. Barely. "A guy named Tom Quinn was the one who made the decision," says Brown. "To me he was really the hero." It was Quinn who gambled on Pong when he was, of all things, the sporting goods buyer.

Java Atari Man

"We went into production with the idea of selling 50,000 units." Brown continues. "We ended up doing double that in the Christmas '75 season. People were waiting two hours in line to sign up on a list just to get a Pong game."

What was interesting about the Sears-Atari alliance was how graphically it illustrated the chasm that existed between those who toiled in California's positively laid-back Silicon Valley and the rest of the business world. Al Alcorn, who negotiated the Sears deal along with Gene Lipkin, recalls two incidents in particular.

"Some of the technicians who did our early chip layouts were a little spacey," Alcorn says. "When the Sears guys came by we'd hide them in the back room. Well, Bob Brown had designed Video Music, our weirdest product ever. Hook it up to your stereo and TV at the same time, and the sound triggered some pretty psychedelic visuals. The Sears guys took one look and asked what we'd been smoking when we did that. Naturally, one of our techs lit up a joint and showed them.

"Another time, 10 guys came out to see our new plant in Los Gatos. We were in our everyday work clothes—tennis shoes and jeans—and they were all dressed in three-piecers. Everybody was getting a little uptight, so Nolan and a bunch of us jumped into some empty boxes and took a ride around the building on the conveyer belt.

"That night the whole group had dinner. We all went home, cleaned up and changed into suits, hoping to make peace. Meanwhile, they'd gone back to their hotel and changed into jeans and sneakers. What a mix-up! The whole thing was pretty funny, we thought."

The Beginning of the End

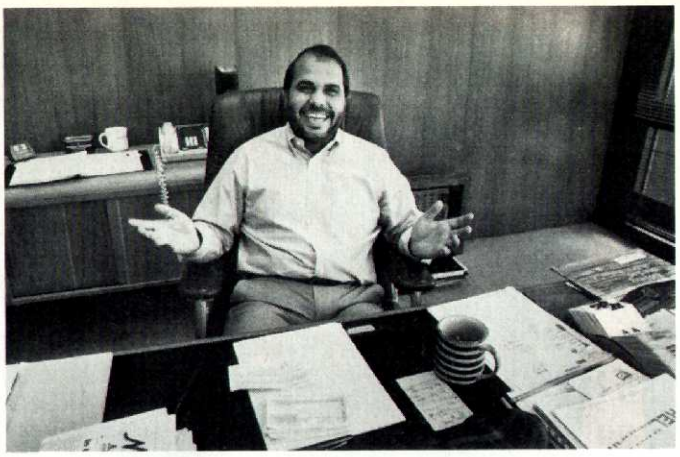
Gene Lipkin left Allied Leisure in Florida in 1974 to join Atari as vice-president for marketing. He still remembers his first conversations with Bushnell well. " Nolan really wanted to shoot the moon. 'Listen guys,' he'd say, 'we

Apr. 13, 1976

The ultimate in Pong, Breakout was designed by "this non-degreed engineer, but sharp kid from Palo Alto," explains Bristow, "named Steve Jobs." (Do you know him? He's only the president of Apple Computer.) Jobs had an unusual working arrangement with Atari at the time. Bushnell would describe a game and specify a certain number of integrated circuits (ICs) he wanted Jobs to use. For every IC he saved he received a $100 bonus. Jobs turned out a very compact prototype of what turned into Breakout. "I think he brought it down from 80 to 30 ICs," says Bristow. "It wasn't common but that's how that one happened."

Aug. 4, 1976

One of Atari's many driving games throughout its early years, Lemans featured 10 different tracks, each named after a famous raceway. Slow and clunky, Lemans was definitely not a milestone by any stretch of the imagination.



Photos by Victoria Rouse

Gene Lipkin: "I left because I wasn't going to change. I wasn't going to become the guy with the pinstriped suit. There are more pinstriped suits walking around Atari then there are on the rest of the planet."

can have this business the way it is, and it will be good to us for the rest of our lives, or we can take a big risk and go for it and see what happens, and we can blow it.' "

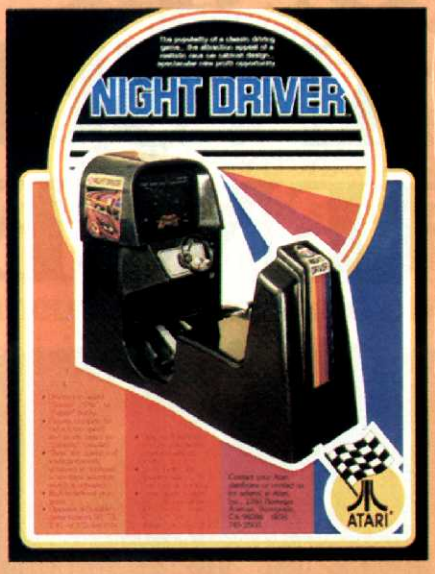
Bushnell went for the moon—selling seasonal consumer products—and blew it. Even with the success of dedicated Pong in '75, the cash wasn't there—it was all going back into inventory that wouldn't be sold off until Christmas. And coin-op games, by the way, weren't exactly tearing up the arcades. Atari was in trouble.

Some have speculated over the years that Bushnell's idiosyncratic style had finally caught up with him. To the contrary, Lipkin claims that Atari was a "well-run company" with good financial discipline. "We were not great structure guys," he admits, "but we didn't think you needed a great structure. We didn't believe in a lot of things big companies were about. And, in fact, neither did Warner at that point." The only thing Atari was lacking, he says, was money.

"It's funny," Lipkin goes on, "we had originally made a grocery list of 10 companies we would be willing to merge Atari with and Warner was not on that list. But through a connection, we made contact with Warner. We were really impressed with them, and I think they liked what they saw. Then boom-boom, the deal was made. I mean, it was *that* quick." So well did everyone get along at first that Bushnell and Manny Gerard, Warner's principal, exchanged signed notes on

COMMUNIST MUTANT FROM SPACE: Bob Brown, who was at Atari from 1974 to 1979, helped bring Pong home.

Oct. 29, 1976



Night Driver and Midway's 280-Zzzzzap both were released at the '76 A.M.O.A. show. Both exhibited the first use of first-person driving. In Night Driver, you sat in the driver's seat (only Atari's second sit-down—Hi-Way was the first) and wound along an eerie stretch of road. It was also converted into a cartridge for the VCS.

Nov. 2, 1976

"The first game I ever came out with," says Imagic's v.p. of software development Dennis Koble, "was Sprint 2, which is still a good game." Atari's first mass-produced microprocessor-based game, Sprint 2 has legs. People are still raving about its slick action. Says Howie Delman, whose credits include Asteroids: "It's one of the great, great all-time games."

Nov. 5, 1976

Atari's only projector game ever, F-1 was a first for Atari in another more interesting respect: It was licensed through Namco (Galaxian, Pac-Man, Dig Dug) in Japan.

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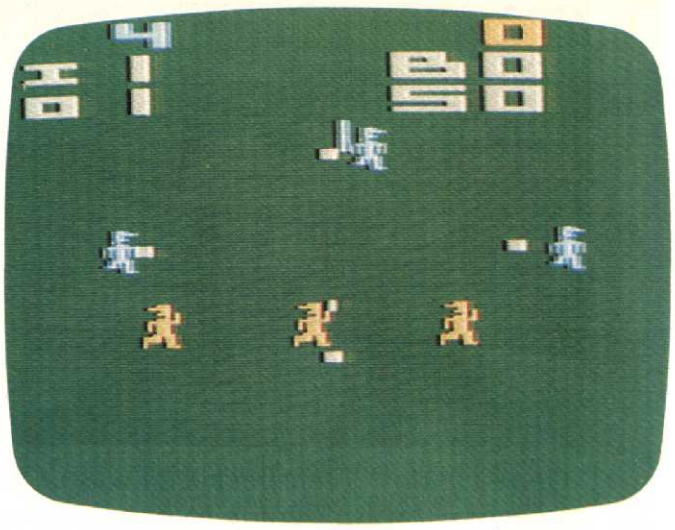

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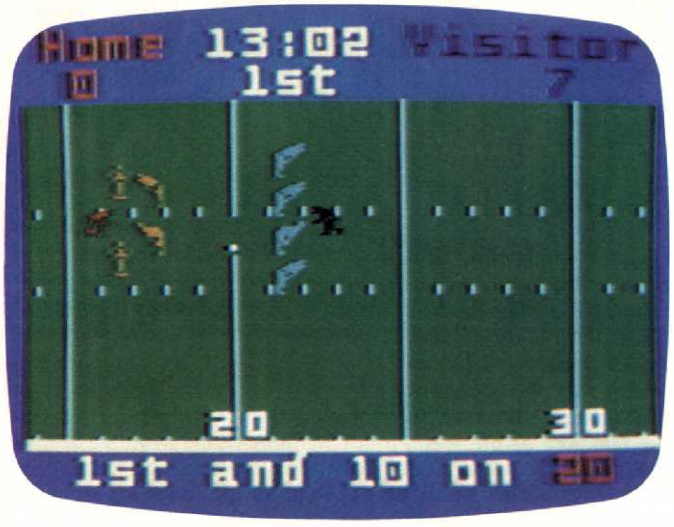
APPARENTLY, GEORGE PLIMPTON ISN'T THE ONLY ONE WHO CAN SEE THE DIFFERENCE.



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GRUMBLING IN THE JUNGLE: Alcorn, Bushnell, Warner's Manny Gerard and an unidentified visitor at Bushnell's retreat in 1977. With more than 400,000 VCS units collecting dust in the warehouse, Warner was growing more nervous by the day.

napkins in the restaurant where the deal transpired.

That was October '76. The next big news out of the Atari camp was another consumer product. This one carried the imposing namesake, Video Computer System (aka, VCS). It was Atari's entry in the programmable game systems race. Code-named Stella, the VCS was conceptualized at Atari's Grass Valley think tank, primarily by Steve Meyer (he is presently the acting president of the computer division), and then developed back at the Los Gatos headquarters by a group of engineers led by Jay Minor.

After its debut at the summer Consumer Electronics Show in 1977, Atari began mass producing the system in preparation for the expected Christmas rush. But sales were soft and stayed that way throughout the following year as the public continued to ignore this new and improved video game product. "It was an education problem," contends Al Miller, who wrote several early cartridges before moving onto Activision. "People didn't know whether to spend $30 to $50 on the numerous dedicated games that were still on the shelves or slap down $180 for the VCS, a considerably larger expense. But as the library of games began to diversify, the public came around. It was an evolutionary process."

The Showdown

With Warner's money, Atari built 800,000 Video Computer Systems in 1978. Ray Kassar, a former executive vice-president at Burlington Industries, had been installed as the president of the consumer division at the beginning of the year. All was not going well.

"It was a very bad year for the company," explains Joe Keenan, who was president at the time. "Clearly we built too many units, which translated into potential disaster. We're talking $40 million worth of inventory that the company was stuck with."

Translated: Gerard's superiors were growing more

Nov. 17, 1976

The first of the wide-bodies, The Atarians was the company's initial attempt to break into the pinball market. Atari followed with a string of games, including Time 2000, Airborne Avenger, Middle Earth and Space Rider.

Nov., 1977

Howie Delman's second Atari project (Super Bug was his first), Canyon Bomber was quickly converted for the VCS. He describes it as "upside-down Breakout" and says it was a far superior two-player competitive game than when played one person versus the computer. He modified the Sprint 2's circuitry, then programmed it.

Apr., 1978

Another Dennis Koble effort, Avalanche is a great example of a game that everybody has played but probably doesn't know. There's no question that Activision's Kaboom (by Larry Kaplan, another Atari alumnus) was a rendition of Avalanche. And while we're on the subject, Drag Race, which came out 10 months earlier, has since become Dragster, another Activision title.

nervous by the day. According to Keenan, Gerard was being pressured to make a change. "I think he had the same confidence we had—that, hey, the 400,000 left-over units were going to move out, that '79 was going to be a banner year—but I think his job was as much on the line as ours turned out to be. I was in the meeting and sensed that the other fellows in the office of the president were very afraid of the Atari situation."

Warner Atari Man

The meeting—Warner's annual budget meeting—took place in November. It proved to be Bushnell's downfall. Before a crowd of high-level executives, Bushnell and Gerard locked horns, screaming at each other for hours. Says Keenan: "We were heads of a big, growing company, but we couldn't make a major decision without calling Manny Gerard. He was the boss figure. Yet we didn't want to get thrown out—we had a big financial stake there."

But out they went (actually Bushnell was demoted from chairman to a director, and Keenan vacated the presidency for the chair position) and in came Kassar. "Ray could have been the scapegoat," Keenan reflects bitterly, "but that wasn't as satisfactory. Manny said he wanted to make him chief executive, and so *c'est la vie.*"

The Transition

Joe Keenan had started in the business as a salesman at IBM. After realizing that he would never become the president of the company ("that's my humble streak," he says), he left for a position at Applied Logic. "I saw that by going to smaller companies it would be possible to get to the top," Keenan confides. "So here I am."

Keenan didn't last very long as Atari's chairman of the board, nor did Bushnell as a mere director of the company he had founded. When they finally departed Atari, they were granted one last wish however: to buy back a fast-food chain concept called Pizza Time Theatre that had been incubating in Grass Valley since 1974. Bushnell the visionary and Keenan the salesman were ready to strike again.

Photo by Victoria Rouse

SAY IT AIN'T SO, JOE: Keenan was replaced by Ray Kassar as president of Atari. "Ray could have been the scapegoat," he says.

Oct., 1978

The first of a slew of Atari sports games (introducing Le Trak Ball), Football was without a doubt the best of the bunch. You had sweeps and keepers and down-and-outs and a video gridiron that seemed like it could go on forever. For a quarter you got a minute-and-a-half, but fanatics were known to pop in 10 bucks worth and go the full hour. The best Atari game since Super Breakout, which came out the month before.

Apr., 1979

Atari's next to last pinball game raised a few bushy eyebrows for obvious reasons. Seven feet high, three-and-a-half feet wide, and nearly eight feet long, and with cue balls to boot, Hercules will forever be the Goliath of the pinball era. Superman was Atari's last pin game and it was killed during the production run.

Meanwhile, over at Atari, the axe had begun to fall. Kassar's first policy edict in January '79 was a freeze on all VCS software development. Essentially, this freed Bob Brown's research and development division from its duties, making the entire staff of 30 engineers expendable. Brown's divison was the first to go.

"I really had no conception that he was going to do that," says the feisty engineer. "In fact, when Al (Alcorn) told me what had happened I didn't understand what he was saying—I couldn't conceive of Atari cutting off its future by chopping off its R & D work. It will always be my opinion that being engineering-oriented was what made Atari successful."

Cro-Magnon Atari Man

Later in the year, Gene Lipkin, the president of the entire coin-operated division, was forced to close down the company's beleaguered pinball works. "It was a mess," he admits, "but we pulled the plug too soon." Noah Anglin, the engineering vice-president at the time, agrees. "Atari pinball machines were disasters, but they were also artistic masterpieces. I mean, we worked day and night, seven days a week on Superman, which was *the* state of the art, and then it got killed. That's probably something I never really forgave the corporation for."

Photos by Victoria Rouse

Noah Anglin: "At IBM, everyone was the same. I could never fly in formation. And I think all those years I was looking for Atari where you didn't have to fly in formation. Then Atari became like IBM."

But Kassar could care less—he was moving full-speed ahead. The new CEO concentrated mostly on selling the VCS year-round and establishing a company workstyle more consistent with his own. Kassar never had to send out a memo detailing work hours, a dress code and so on. Gradually, people got the message.

Frank Ballouz, who became vice-president for marketing

Aug., 1979

Lunar Lander is an interesting story for a lot of reasons. It was a game that had been around forever on PDP and IBM computers (only in text). It was Atari's first game that utilized an XY hardware system (vector graphics). It had already sold 5,000 units when Atari killed it to make room for Asteroids on the assembly line. Collectors, take note: Delman says that there are 200 Asteroids that went out in Lunar Lander cabinets, same art and all.

Nov., 1980

Battle Zone has attracted an awful lot of attention ever since the Army hired Atari to modify it for training purposes. Eddie Rotberg, now a v.p. of engineering at Videa, programmed both versions. He preferred working on the original. "Battle Zone," says Rotberg, "was the first truly first-person game." Yet another first for Atari.

Mar., 1981

Let's go back to November 6, 1979 when Asteroids, Atari's bestselling coin-op game of all time (70,000 units), was released. The story goes that Asteroids was once a game called Cosmos. Actually, Cosmos was once known as Planet Grab, in which you had to claim a planet by touching it. Anyway, Ed Logg programmed Asteroids, Delman did the circuitry, and Lyle Rains nursed the idea until rocks began swimming around in his head.

Frank Ballouz: "I always came to work in jeans and boots and never a tie. I don't remember what my reason was, but I started to change. Eventually, everyone else did, too."

in coin-op when Lipkin was promoted to president, recalls when Bushnell and Keenan were the only ones who wore ties in the company. "I came to work in jeans and boots and never a tie. Then, after Nolan and Joe were gone—I don't remember what my reasoning was—I started to change. I'd wear slacks and still a shirt, open-collared. Then I progressed into wearing a tie . . . and once in a while a jacket. Eventually, everyone else did the same. I think it was that we were becoming more of a professional organization. It just slowly evolved into a different dressing style at Atari."

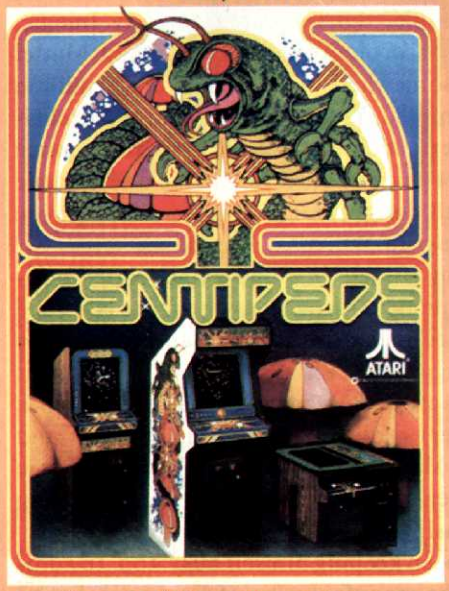
For Don Osborne, who was hired by Ballouz in 1977, the evolution was 360 degrees. "The first day I came to work," he says, "I walked in wearing a three-piece suit. I remember sitting in Frank's office when Gil Williams (vice-president for manufacturing at the time) came in, took one look at me and laughed. He just laughed at me. So I said, 'What are you laughing at?' He said, 'The tie.' That was the last time I wore a tie for two years."

The Exodus

Ironically, just as Warner and Kassar had pulled the company out of the financial hole with a sweeping marketing and advertising campaign that created unprecedented demand for the VCS, Atari's desertion rate began to climb. Most notable of the early defectors was Steve Jobs, who, during his tour in coin-op, had been designing a personal computer that became the Apple, and four software designers who went off to form Activision. Perhaps less notable, but of equal importance, was Noah Anglin's departure.

Like Keenan, Anglin began his professional career at IBM. After 14 years there, he brought his engineering and manufacturing expertise to Atari in 1976. He couldn't help but note the contrast in corporate styles. "At IBM everyone was the same," he says. "They used to put on my reviews: 'Anglin, you can be a wild duck but you have to fly in formation.' I never could fly in formation. And I think all

June, 1981



Atari's second bestselling coin-op game (50,000), Centipede is basically Space Invaders with a Trak Ball. One of the few female engineers in the business, Donna Bailey programmed it. "My main focus is graphics," she says. "For instance, I really like pastels, which is why there are so many pinks and greens and violets in Centipede. I really think the visuals should be arresting."

Oct., 1981

After great success with its XY games Atari decided it was time to go technicolor. Tempest was the first example of that. With its 96 levels and skill-step innovation (you could start the game at a higher level if you wished), Tempest carried the state-of-the-art banner until Zaxxon came along. It was designed by Dave Theurer of Missile Command renown.

Apr., 1982

It sure took Atari long enough to bring back a candy apple from Japan. Dig Dug is the first confection Atari has licensed since F-1 and now Kangaroo is the second. Meanwhile, Atari is getting into the licensing racket, too. The company recently dumped Tunnel Hunt on Centuri because manufacturing was all booked—or so they say.

those years I was looking for Atari where you didn't have to fly in formation."

But times change, and Anglin grew unhappy at Atari as well. As an engineer, he was particularly disturbed by the slow movement of product out the door. "The company just got too big, too fast," he maintains. "Three months was not an unusual length of time to develop and manufacture a game when I got there. Suddenly, it was taking a year, a year and a half.

"We might yell and scream for 15 minutes at each other," Anglin adds, "but we'd make a decision that most companies would take a year to make. We were making decisions on the fly that involved major changes in the company. They can't do that anymore. Atari became like IBM."

Joe Keenan: "Ray Kassar (photo left) doesn't interface very far down. He couldn't even if he wanted to. That's just the way he is."

Indeed, the company's growth has been dramatic: from less than 1,000 employees about the time of the Warner sale to nearly 10,000 today. So massive has Atari become—the company has more than 50 office buildings in Silicon Valley 50 miles south of San Francisco and manufacturing facilities in El Paso, Tex., Taiwan and Ireland—that few really know who's making what decisions on the executive level. Many observers claim that Atari is now "out of touch, out of mind."

"When you work for a small company," says the obviously biased Joe Keenan, "it's quite possible for everybody to know the ultimate decision-maker. The smallest guy knows the top guy, which makes you feel that you're part of that decision just because you know who made it. But as a company gets bigger, that becomes quite impossible. There are certain management styles which unfortunately make it more impossible, and maybe that's the case at Atari.

"Ray Kassar doesn't interface very far down. He couldn't interface all the way down even if he wanted to, but he doesn't want to go very far. That's just the way he is."

Says Anglin: "Ray's a perfect guy to run a corporation. If you want someone who bases his decisions on facts, not emotions, then that's him. He's a strictly bottom-line oriented guy."

Pinstriped Atari Man

In the cases of Al Alcorn and Gene Lipkin, two continual thorns in Kassar's side, both are being paid handsomely to stay at home. "I left because I wasn't going to change," Lipkin bristles. "I wasn't going to become the guy with the pinstriped suit. That wasn't me." Alcorn would sooner tool around in his planes and operate his trout farm in Carmel than fight with the powers that be at Atari and Warner.

"I'm part of the beach club," Lipkin says with a touch of whimsy. "But if I had my druthers, I'd rather be in the business."

The Next Step

In this, the tenth year of Atari's existence, many ex-Atarians are able to find consolation in their latest endeavors. For example, the software company Imagic, which was started by a group of former Atari and Mattel employees, will ship somewhere in the vicinity of $50 million worth of cartridges in 1982. Videa, comprised of three rebellious coin-op engineers, should release its first arcade game sometime in the next year, and Steve Ritchie and Eugene Jarvis, former pinball designers, continue to wreak havoc in the arcades, courtesy of Williams Electronics.

After three years at Hitachi in a non-game related position, Bob Brown suddenly resurfaced on the scene last June with an unusual piece of hardware that can upgrade the Atari VCS. Once plugged into the system, his Supercharger and its compatible software (which must be played on a cassette tape recorder) provides remarkable graphics and superior gameplay. Marketed by Arcadia—Brown is the executive vice-president—the Supercharger is an interesting alternative to purchasing a new TV-game system.

Noah Anglin has been keeping himself busy, too. In addition to supervising the manufacturing of Vectrex, General Consumer Electronics' exciting new portable game system, he has begun to search for venture capitalists who would back another new game company. "I think I could put together a reasonably good team," he says, "and do it the right way. Keep the fun element in it. I think there is a new look to the product coming. Maybe a different version of the product. Like when Atari did the wide-bodied pinballs with the jazzy new look. I think something like that is going to happen in video."

So does Gene Lipkin. Right now he is president of By Video Inc., one of 10 companies under the umbrella of the

(Continued on page 80)

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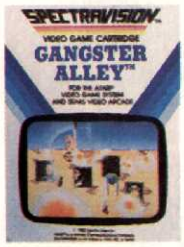

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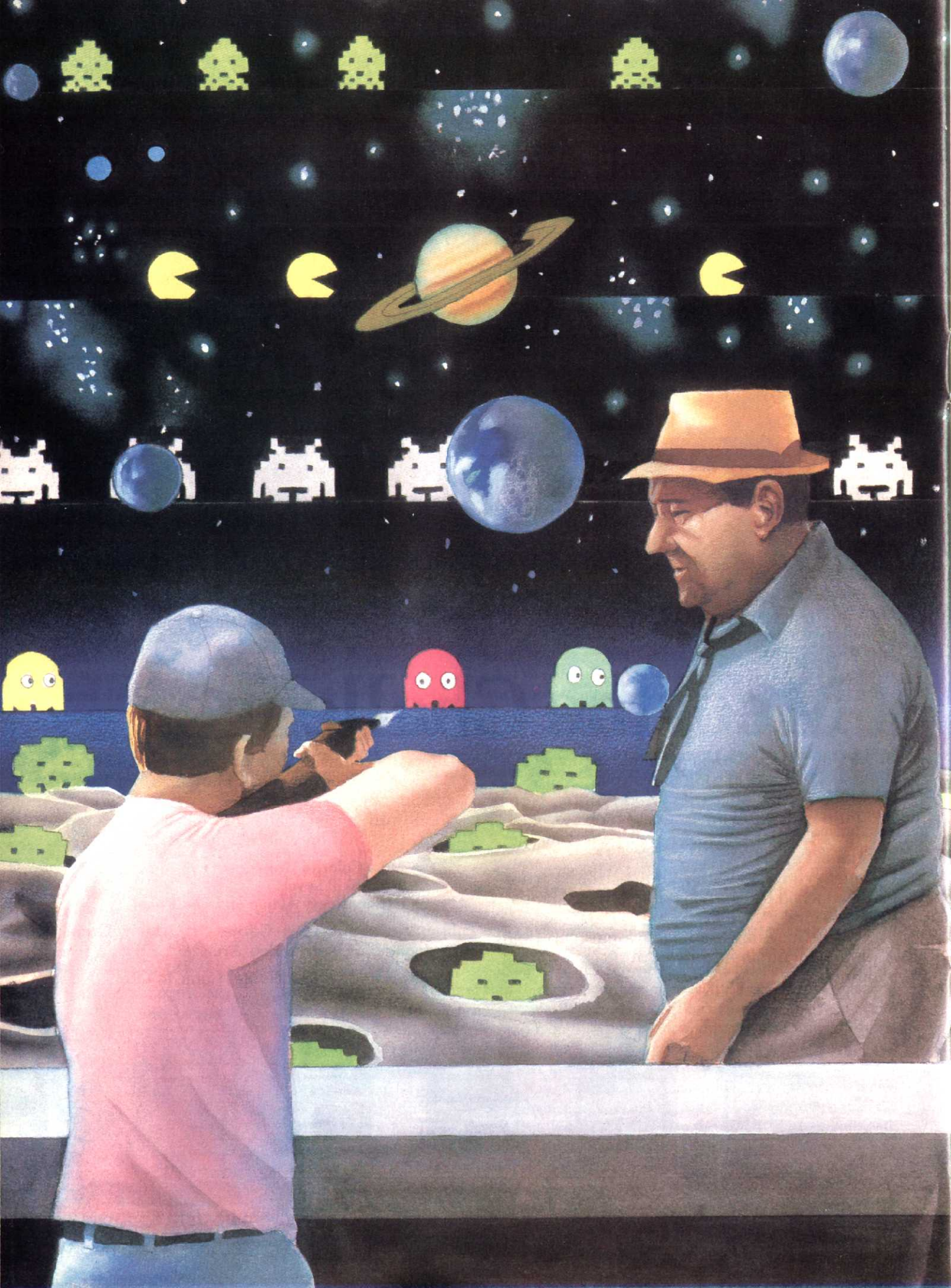


The House That Pac Built

Midway Manufacturing is king of the coin-op hill and loving it!

By Andrea Stone

Sometimes Lady Fate smiles on you and sometimes she doesn't. In the video games explosion of the '70s it sure helped to have her on your side. Trying to hit the right nerve in the new and constantly changing universe of electronic games was like walking into a pitch black room and fumbling to find the light switch. Who could see into the future?

It was a lot like that for Bally/Midway back then, particularly in the early part of the decade when your typical arcade featured a menu of pinball games, road-racing simulations and rifle-shoots. It was around this time—1972 to be exact—that a brash young engineer from California flew to Midway's headquarters in Franklin Park, Ill. to demonstrate his latest invention—two electronic paddles wacking an electronic ball back and forth across a TV screen. The Midway brain-trust yawned. The engineer returned to California, started his own company and manufactured the game. The engineer was Nolan Bushnell. The game was Pong. The company became Atari.

A few years later, a young game designer named Larry Rosenthal approached Midway with another unique video proposition. He had created a version of the campus computer game Space-war, using vector graphics for the first time in a coin-op machine. Once again, Midway balked. Rosenthal subsequently sold the game to Cinematronics. Dubbed Space Wars, it became the video hit of 1978.

But neither of these lapses could have ever matched the blunder of the century Bally nearly committed in 1979. Stan Jarocki, Midway's vice-president of marketing, had returned from Japan positively electrified by Namco's Puck-Man game. "I was really excited," he smiles. "It was a very pleasant departure from the usual space, combat and shooting games. Plus it was totally simple to operate and easy to understand." Jarocki urged Bally president Robert Mullane to buy the rights to market and manufacture Puck-Man in the States. "He turned it down, plain and simple," Jarocki blushes.

This is when Lady Fate—in the form of Midway's governing committee—stepped in. Midway proceeded to overrule Mullane and make the deal with Namco. The game, of course, was retitled Pac-Man. It has made the company a fortune.

Midway execs can afford to laugh these days about their blunders and near-blunders of the past. They have had plenty of success to dull the pain. Back

Illustration by Mark Caparosa

in 1974 when the company was floundering, at least one wise decision was made: Midway would begin importing games from Japan (a delicious little irony since Midway is the name of the pivotal naval battle in the Pacific in World War II). Five years later, a Japanese creation named Space Invaders hit America with the force of Godzilla. It was Midway who negotiated to bring it here.

Space Invaders sold a then record-setting 72,000 units and was followed by 45,000 Galaxians. But even those astronomical figures couldn't prepare Midway—or the world for that matter—for Pac-Man. Since 1980, a total of 190,000 Pac-Man and Ms. Pac-Man machines have rolled off the company's assembly lines. Says Jarocki: "No one could have ever guessed this would happen."

With Midway expected to account for nearly half of Bally's projected $1 billion in revenue for 1982—Bally also manufactures slot machines, owns casinos, hotels, and, among other things, the Alladin's Castle arcade chain—it's little wonder why one industry analyst crows: "There's no telling how many games Midway can come up with. They've yet to scratch the surface."

* * *

There's no mistaking Midway's corporate headquarters in Franklin Park. You are first greeted by a welcome mat-like sign outside the main building on West Belmont that reads, "The Home of Pac-Man & Ms. Pac-Man." Once inside, you are gobbled up by all types of Pac-paraphernalia, such as a handsome hook rug featuring Mr. and Ms. Pac's persistent pursuers, Inky, Pinky, Blinky and Clyde.

Pac-hero Stan Jarocki never seems to be without reminders of the yellow fellow either. The well-groomed executive wears a custom designed, solid gold ring bearing the image of our most cherished cartoon character since Snoopy. One wall in his office displays a gold replica of Buckner & Garcia's million-selling album, *Pac-Man Fever,* and he even drinks out of a Pac-Man glass.

Jarocki is explaining what prompted the company to go the Ms. Pac-Man route. "It was our way of saying thanks to the ladies who've helped the industry so much. Ms. Pac-Man was named for that one reason." When asked if there's a Pac-Man Junior in the works, he dodges the question like a boxer avoiding a jab. "There could always be another follow-up," Jarocki says, playfully. "You can't cut off success."

BONANZAI: Gunfight, Midway's first license from Japan, preceded Space Invaders by four years.

Perish the thought. In 1982, Midway will ship more than 200,000 video games (94,000 Ms. Pac-Man units alone). At this very moment, Tron is congesting the conveyor belts. When Disney realized its film property was a perfect vehicle for an arcade game, Midway received a call. The company proceeded to design, manufacture and distribute the game in only three months (see sidebar). Shortly after the film was released Tron dislodged Zaxxon as the highest earning coin-op game in the country.

Down the hall, Midway's co-founder and former president Hank Ross is sitting in an office he seldom uses anymore. Now semi-retired, he's here visiting from his home in La Jolla, Calif. Technically, Ross is a consultant but more accurately, he's a father figure and mentor for almost everyone at Midway. Throughout the day, com-

That'll Be a Six-Pac to Go

Even the most ardent Pac-Man aficionado will concede you can't spend every waking hour gobbling up blue monsters. But you can take Pac-Man or, rather, licensed facsimiles of him just about everywhere you go. According to Stan Jarocki, Midway's vice-president of marketing, nearly 100 companies now own the rights to produce a startling 500 separate Pac-related items. And each and every one of them bears the likeness of that voracious gourmand.

If you're a typical teenager, you may never have to lose sight of him again. For instance, after a sound night's sleep in your Pac-P.J.s on your Pac-sheets, you jump into the shower and wash with a bar of Pac-soap. After drying off with a Pac-towel, it's time to get dressed. Let's see. Your wardrobe is bulging with Pac-everything—from underwear to shoes (with matching laces, of course) to cap, jacket and tie. And if you are a teenage girl, you probably have an assortment of Pac-jewelry—earrings, pendants, rings—to choose from.

Photo by Frank Lusk

MS. WIMPIE: I'll gladly pay you Tuesday for a Pac-burger today.

Now it's off to school. Don't forget the lunch box with you-know-who right on the front. Uh oh. Your official Pac-digital watch says you're late. Better get those Pac skates on and make up some time.

After school, you can call up friends on your Pac-phone while strains of "Pac-Man Fever" lilt from your portable Pac-radio. Then you do your homework in a Pac-notebook, followed by a little needlepoint of our chubby hero. Finally, it's time to hit the Pac-sack. Put aside your Pac-snack tray and turn off the Pac-lamp.

If all this sounds pretty ridiculous consider that Midway expects to gross between eight and 10 million dollars in 1981 from licensing alone. Anybody have a Pac-Man adding machine?

—*A.S.*

MCP to Midway: Three Months or Else

Scene I, Take I.

Place: Midway's sprawling headquarters in Franklin Park, Ill. Time: August, 1981. Zoom in on graphics designers George Gomez and his assistants, Sharon Barr and Marshall Jordan. They have just been handed their latest assignment: create a video game based on Disney Studios' upcoming computer-animated film *Tron*. And do it in three months.

Gomez narrates the scene: "We sat down to design Tron from nothing more than a script and a few preproduction sketches the size of a large slide. We worked for three months without any guidance from Disney, which was still filming. Finally, we got a six-minute trailer to work from."

Scene 34, Take 19.

Same place. Two months later, 2 a.m. Pan same group, obviously exhausted. We hear Gomez in voice-over: "There were some problems with Disney although they were very positive. We decided early on that they knew movies and we knew games. But there was the time problem. Over there they could decide to make a change overnight. Here it takes a lot longer.

"For instance, I designed the first iridescent control grip ever made because all the people in the film have a blue glow. Well, at one point, I got scared because they thought about making the glow red. That just doesn't look as good on a game."

Scene 41, Take 4.

The office of Bill Adams, Midway's director of software. Same time. "We started with six sets from the movie and were only able to incorporate four into the game (the film's I-O Tower, Master Control Program, Light Cycles and Tank Battle). Six was just too difficult for the operator to set up. In the end I think the Light Cycles and Tank scenes are the closest to the movie."

Cut to Gomez: "Yes, but in the movie the Light Cycles' grid was white and there were colored walls. The game's tracers tended to get lost so we had to make the background black. In the end, we had to say, 'Our game has to stand by itself as a game.'"

Scene 52, Take 3.

Disney Studios, Burbank, Calif. A little later. Gomez and the film's effects editor, Richard Taylor, are conferring. Gomez narrates: "He was more interested in the cabinet visuals than anything else. The game had to look like a piece of furniture right off the set.

"Especially since the first prototype of the game appears in the movie. Jeff Bridges is seen playing it, although you don't see the name Tron. You do see Midway's name on

the coin slot and, if you look very closely, you can see my name in the handle's black LED dots. It says Gomez, but all turned around."

Scene 86, Take 1.

The floor of Midway's production factory. Several months later. Wide shot of 20,000th Tron game rolling off assembly line. Focus in on very happy executives. Fade to green.

The End. —*A.S.*

pany brass drop in and out of his office to ask for advice or pass along a tasty bit of gossip.

Ross is a walking history of the company. He tells how he and his partner Marcine "Iggy" Wolverton founded Midway in 1958, debuted with a quasi-legitimate bingo-pinball game called Red Ball, and followed with a parade of pinball and "pitch & bat" games housed in pinball cabinets. Winner (1964) might have been the most ingenious of the lot. By hitting one of the targets at the far end of the playfield—marked one, two, or four lengths—you set off an animated auto race inside the back glass. Another catchy number was Mystery Score (1964), with its timely monster motif. But by 1969, the company was in financial trouble and Ross and Wolverton decided to sell out to Bally.

Ross admits that Midway was "lowest on the totem pole" when the first video games hit the streets in 1972. "Everyone else was ahead of us in terms of electronics," he explains. Three videos helped establish Midway in the mid-'70s: Winner (a copy of Pong which, ironically, Midway licensed from Atari); Gunfight (the company's first Japanese game, courtesy of Taito Corporation); and Sea Wolf (which was designed by Bally's Nutting Associates). Each sold over 5,000 units at a time when, according to Jarocki, 3,000 units was big news.

Still, life at Midway remained a constant struggle. By 1978, Atari's Football and Breakout games had given the California company a commanding lead in the coin-op race. Something had to be done and quick. The big break came when Taito tipped Midway to the new game that was causing all kinds of chaos on the islands. Kids were skipping school and suddenly the country was experiencing a yen shortage. What was going on? Space Invaders, of course.

Space Invaders' popularity set off a rush to Japan that was not unlike America's corporate shift to the Sun-

(Continued on page 72)

SOFT SPOT

Reviews: 16 New Carts for the VCS

By Perry Greenberg

The great TV-game wars have begun, though unlike the geopolitical landscape only one superpower has emerged: Atari. No doubt this is because there are more Atari Video Computer Systems (VCS) in American homes then all of the other game systems combined. But, ultimately, Atari's unparalleled success may be its own undoing. Like they say on Wall Street, the razor's always going to need new blades, and Activision, Imagic and a host of other software-only upstarts will be more than willing to provide them.

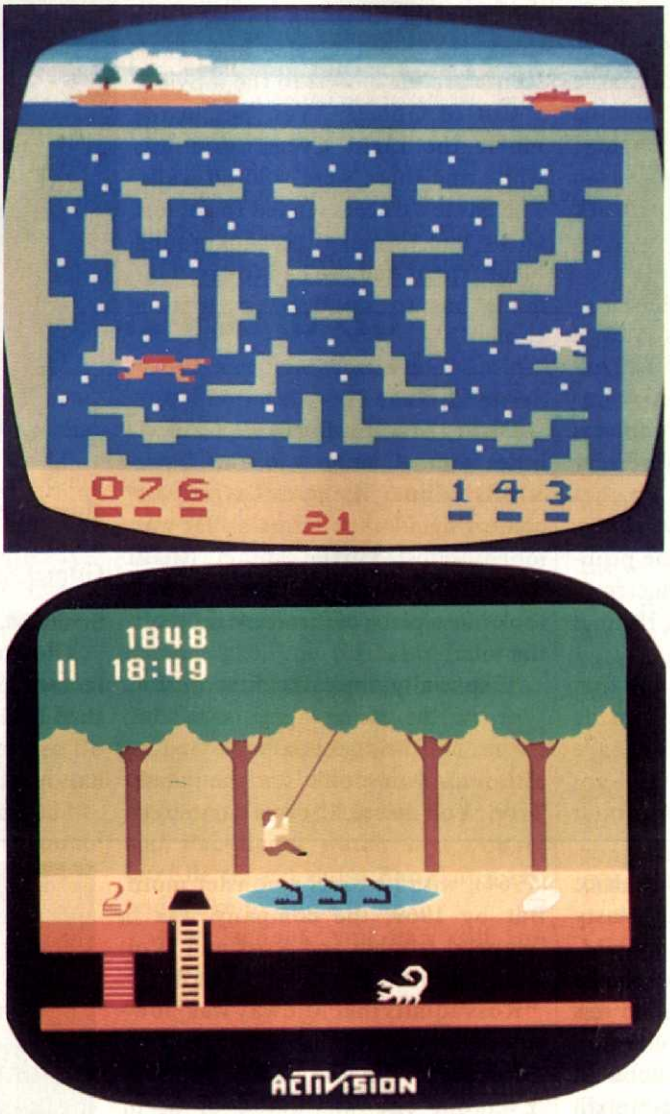
Ever since Activision opened the floodgates in 1980 a tidal wave of companies has appeared with cartridges for the VCS. In this intense competition, only those producing the strongest products at the best price will survive. In the final analysis, the consumer stands to gain the most—imaginative, quality games.

Another point is no longer does a company need millions of dollars to join in the fray. Thousands, apparently, will do. Ironically, Comma-Vid, probably the tiniest company in the business, has released as is debut the largest cartride I have ever seen. **Cosmic Swarm** must have everything in it but the kitchen sink. In this Asteroids-type game, you move your ship in any direction, and you can rotate it by pressing the red button on the Atari joystick. In fact, this ship moves more precisely than the one in Asteroids, which is just the edge you need to go up against The Swarm. These termite-type characters which most resemble Chinese letters try to wall in the playing field by dropping blocks everywhere they go. Destroy them before they box you in by blasting away whenever they're carrying their blocks. This will do away with both the termite and his block simultaneously. If, however, you can't spray the little bugger before it drops its block, you can still earn points for shooting the termite as it escapes.

Once the blocks are set in place and turn green, they're indestructible. But nail an attacking bug where that green block is and suddenly it becomes red and is vulnerable again. Meanwhile, to make things even more complicated, you have to refuel every time you hear the warning signal by docking with one of the ships cruising along the side of the screen. If you can't make it, you lose the game immediately. Phew!

Graphically, Cosmic Swarm is pretty unappealing unless you're into Chinese literature. But it does provide an action-filled, challenging scenario with plenty to keep you occupied. It's about as tough as any game I've played this side of the arcades.

Spectravision, another rising star in the TV-game galaxy, certainly backs up its corporate slogan ("Meets the



Shark Attack (top), or Loch Jaw as it was known its previous life, is a maze game that owes little to Pac-Man. In Pitfall (bottom) you get to play electronic Tarzan and Mario the Carpenter all at once.

Dr. Video will return next month with miraculous news of earth-shattering importance.

challenge") with two entertaining entries, Planet Patrol and Gangster Alley. A difficult-to-master dodge-'em and shoot-'em-up game, **Planet Patrol** has some interesting variations, including sequences with exploding debris, a rescue operation and a petrol stop courtesy of a cute miniature truck. There's also an exciting night-flying round where your adversaries are illuminated with just the light from your laser cannons. Planet Patrol is aces.

In **Gangster Alley,** you use a cursor—as in Missile Command—to line up your foes. Though it's no Missile Command, Gangster Alley does have its charms. The object is to vanquish a nasty group of armed hoods whose heads keep popping up in the windows of a tenement-type building. Aim with the joystick and fire with the button before they shoot you. It's pretty easy until you encounter Nitro Ed. That's the maniac standing on the roof waving a bomb. You see, Ed can't be killed by a hit, just disarmed momentarily. Plus, if he wastes you, it's game-time. The final insult is a full-screen image of Ed laughing at you. Very funny. While I found Gangster Alley too much work for my worn reflexes, I suspect that the younger generation of gamers will have little trouble handling these electronic nogoodniks.

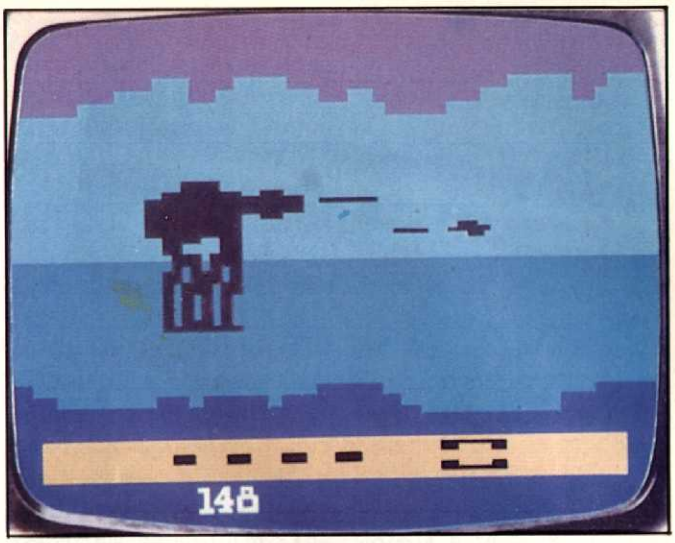
Now, let's get on to the big boys. Parker Brothers, the company that made "Pass Go—Collect $200" a household phrase, would seem to have a sure bet with the first-ever, film-as-video-game creation, **The Empire Strikes Back.** I wouldn't bet on it.

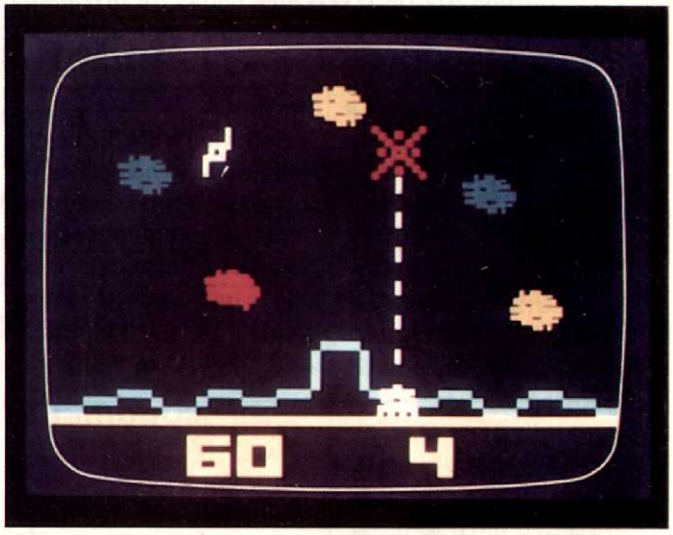
An obvious Defender ripoff, the object here is to destroy several Imperial Walkers before they blow up your base. To obliterate one of these lumbering behemoths, you have to shoot it 48 times while avoiding the missiles they periodically lob at you. Boring! Fortunately, the game does have a few neat tricks, like when the colored square appears on the Walker (hit it once and watch the Walker go bye-bye), the automatic repair gimmick (land your damaged vehicle in a valley on planet's surface), and "The Force" (momentary invulnerability). But that's all there is. Empire is a dull, ill-conceived game that just happens to have a famous name.

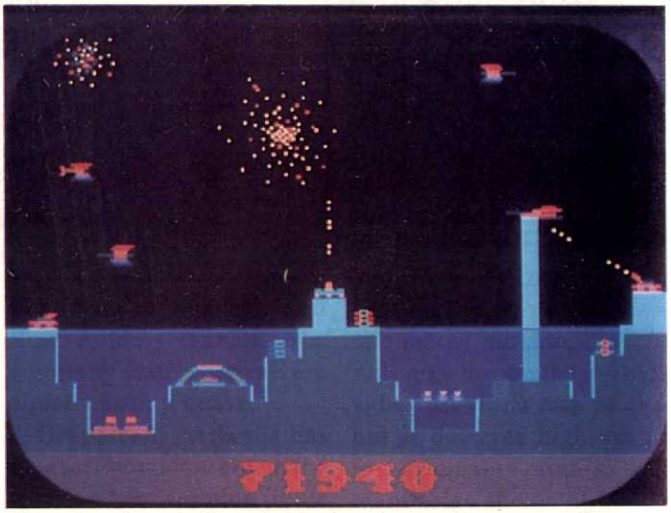
Frogger fans take heart, though. Parker Brothers has admirably fulfilled your need for a suitable TV version of the popular arcade game. Not only does Parker's **Frogger** look and sound like the coin-op hit, it plays like it, too. Following the nifty little tune that is Frogger's trademark, you begin navigating the intrepid amphibian across a treacherous playing field. I never could understand the popularity of this slow-moving, rather simple-minded game, but if hopping and squishing is your thing, Frogger is sure to delight.

Frogs seem to be "in" this year. Atari (who?) has just released its variation on the frog theme called **Frog Pond.** As beautiful as Frog Pond looks, that's how dull it plays. Two silhouetted creatures, who do indeed look like frogs, sit on what appears to be a log in an aquamarine video lake, doing what frogs are supposed to do: hop up and down and snatch insects with their whip-like tongues. This may be an enjoyable as well as nourishing way for a frog to spend its day, but I'm afraid frogs catching flies for points is a less than appetizing human divertissement. Ribid.

Atari breaks even less

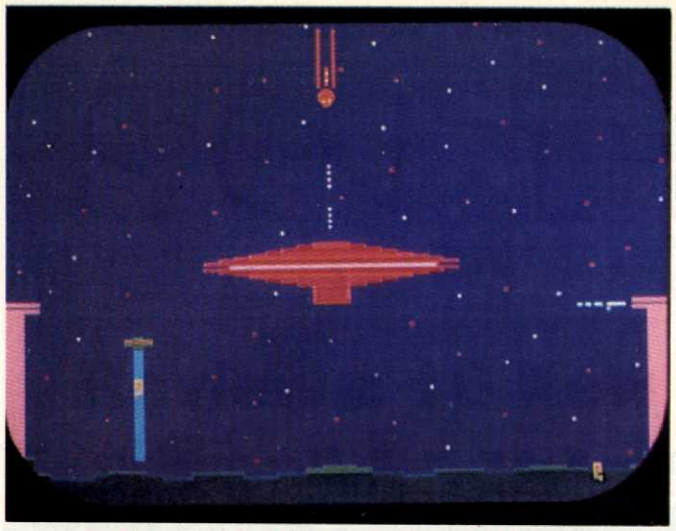


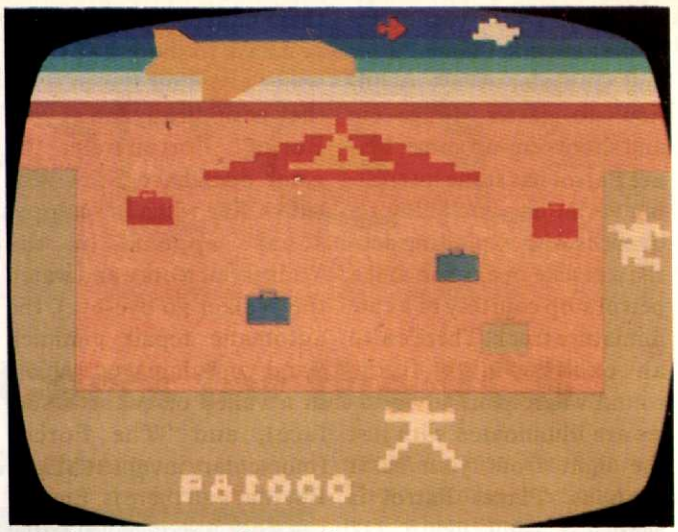




The Empire Strikes Back (top), the first-ever, film-as-video-game, is not worth the price of admission. Astroblast (middle), one of the first Intellivision-as-VCS-games, is Astrosmash. Atlantis (below) is out-of-this-world. Four robots all the way.

ground with another new offering called **Demons to Diamonds.** This game involves shooting an assortment of little creatures (what else is new?) with the paddle control. The demons that are the same color as you can't shoot you but do reincarnate briefly as diamonds,





Cosmic Ark (left) gets high marks for originality and its humanitarian theme of saving—two animals each from dying planets—rather than destroying. Lost Luggage (right), on the other hand, flunks for cheating. It's a bad version of Kaboom. That simple.

which, when hit, are worth a bonus. The demons that are a different color than you transform into skulls and start firing back when they are hit. Demons is dumb, plus the graphics are inferior. The giant of the industry has produced another dwarf.

And what were the boys at Activision—who ignited the cartridge explosion with clever games and superior graphics—thinking when they came up with **Megamania?** A gastronomical farce of sorts in which fast foods such as hamburgers and waffles march top to bottom, Megamania is one more example of Activision's sillier side (see Freeway and Fishing Derby). But is it fun to play? Next cartridge.

Activision, however, redeems itself with **Pitfall,** a game that combines all the necessary ingredients for a sure-fire hit. The idea is to guide a human figure through treacherous terrain by having him run and jump over obstacles much like Mario does in Donkey Kong. The similarity to DK ends

there, though, for Pitfall is about crocodiles, scorpions, underground caverns and lost treasure, not an ape and a girl. There's even a sequence where our hero must catch a vine and swing perilously over the pit like an electronic Tarzan. The graphics are clean, colorful and innovative. But is Pitfall fun to play? Definitely.

Historically, sports games have not translated particularly well on the VCS. Except for Activision's wonderful Tennis cartridge and possibly Atari's Basketball, realism has been seriously lacking—from Pele's Soccer to Home Run baseball. Still, you have to credit Apollo (of Space Chase and Space Cavern fame) for giving it the old college try with **Racquetball**—even if it is a mess. The court looks like something involving concentric parallelograms out of a high school geometry textbook; when the two players cross each other, not only can't you decide which player is which, but you can't figure out whose turn it is; and since the ball and its shadow are both represented by white cubes you never know if you're making contact with the ball or hitting a phantom. (There's even a third cube bouncing around the court—damned if I know what it's doing there.) Perhaps some games should be left on the court and off the tube.

The good news for Apollo is **Shark Attack,** a maze game that has some novel twists and clever graphics. As a scuba diver whose goal is to gather up diamonds scattered around an underwater maze, you must steer clear of ravenous sharks and a dormant Loch Ness monster who, when disturbed, relentlessly pursues the offending diver and can only be eluded if the diver enters one of the mysterious caves. Shark Attack or Loch Jaw, as it was formerly and more aptly titled, may be the first maze game that is not a conspicuous Pac-man rip-off, and for that alone I offer kudos to the people at Apollo. It also happens to be fun to play and great to look at. Bravo!

Returning to the bad news, there is **Lost Luggage,** also by Apollo, which is a fairly obvious clone of Activision's successful Kaboom cartridge. Here, instead of catching bombs released by a mad man, you flag down suitcases spinning wildly off an airport luggage carousel. The two games are so alike that some suitcases are even marked as terrorists' bags that, lo and behold, blow up if not caught in much the same manner as the Kaboom bombs. I've always felt that Kaboom—not much of a game in my opinion—was a hit solely because of the dearth of TV-game competition when it came out. Back then (1980), you didn't expect much and you got even less, whereas today a game that involves catching suitcases before they explode—even if they do release a flood of electronic underwear—just doesn't wash.

While one-out-of-three ain't too bad in Apollo's case, Imagic continues to bat 1.000. I don't know what Imagic's secret is, but if I could bottle it I'd make a fortune. This company consistently comes up with winners. Demon Attack and Star Voyager already have set the standards in their respective game forms: the post-Space Invaders and Star Raiders themes. The company's latest arrivals are equally as impressive.

Graphically, **Atlantis** has no peer. What you see on the screen when you plug in the cartridge can only be described as dazzling. Before you lies the stunning, futuristic city of Atlantis, with its domed palace, multi-colored generators and laser-armed sentry posts. The object is to defend Atlantis from an insidious Gorgan air fleet. You're armed with three anti-aircraft batteries—the one in the center of the screen is called the command post, the two at the opposite ends of the screen are the sentry posts. Since the guns are at fixed positions, timing your shots is the only way to make your hits on the enemy fleet. As it descends, the spectacular, colorful bombers—hit one and it explodes like fireworks—emit death rays with accompanying sound effects that are right out of a Grade A science fiction movie. So much attention is paid to detail that even after the city is destroyed, a satellite streaks into space leaving it up to the imagination whether someone has survived to carry forth the civilization into a new world. Atlantis is just a terrific game that keeps you glued to your joystick.

It's pretty hard to top Atlantis, and Imagic's other new entry, **Cosmic Ark,** is no threat. Even so, this game stands very well on its own merit. In Cosmic Ark, it's your job to save species of animals from dying planets by beaming them up via your shuttle ships and then piloting the shuttles back to your starship—a kind of galactic Noah's Ark—within a limited time span. You have to contend with meteor showers, elusive creatures, and planetary defense systems bent on thwarting your cosmic mercy mission. Cosmic Ark may not be the average video warrior's cup of tea, but it deserves high marks for originality and its humanitarian theme of saving rather than destroying.

With all of these companies clawing for every last dollar VCS owners have budgeted for new cartridge purchases, did you really believe Mattel would sit passively forever? Strange as it may seem, the maker of Intellivision is now also producing

(Continued on page 70)

Rating by Robots

- Cosmic Swarm
- Planet Patrol
- Gangster Alley
- The Empire Strikes Back
- Frogger
- Frog Pond
- Megamania
- Demons to Diamonds
- Pitfall
- Racquetball
- Shark Attack
- Lost Luggage
- Atlantis
- Cosmic Ark
- Astroblast
- Space Attack

Four robots is the highest rating.

BOOK BEAT

Notes from the Video Game Underground

By Roger Dionne

The place to start, I suppose, is with the phone call that interrupted a good night's sleep one morning last February. Two months earlier David Sklansky, a professional poker player living here in Las Vegas, and I had submitted a lengthy proposal to Prentice-Hall for a book called *Expert Poker*. We still hadn't received a reply.

The phone call was from Peter Tobey, publisher of Banbury Books. He and editor Ed Claflin had read "Plugged into Electronic Games," an article of mine which appeared in *Games* magazine a month earlier, and liked it.

"If we were to send you a couple of hundred video game cartridges, do you think you could write 300-to-400-word descriptions of them? The book we have in mind is *A Buyer's Guide to Home Video Games.*"

Quickly, I realized this was the sort of call I had been waiting a lifetime for. "Yes," I said, dreamily. "I think I can manage that."

Tobey suggested a dollar figure as an advance. It was more than I'd received for anything I'd written in the past, and here he was offering it before I'd submitted a word. Gamblers, I could see, didn't live only in Las Vegas. I accepted Tobey's offer on the spot.

As might be expected, a response from Prentice-Hall was waiting in the mail the next day. "Dear Mr. Dionne and Mr. Sklansky: It is a pleasure to send you the contracts for your book. . . ." Suddenly, I was obliged to complete a video games book by Apr. 9 and a poker book by May 15. I really believed I could finish them both on schedule.

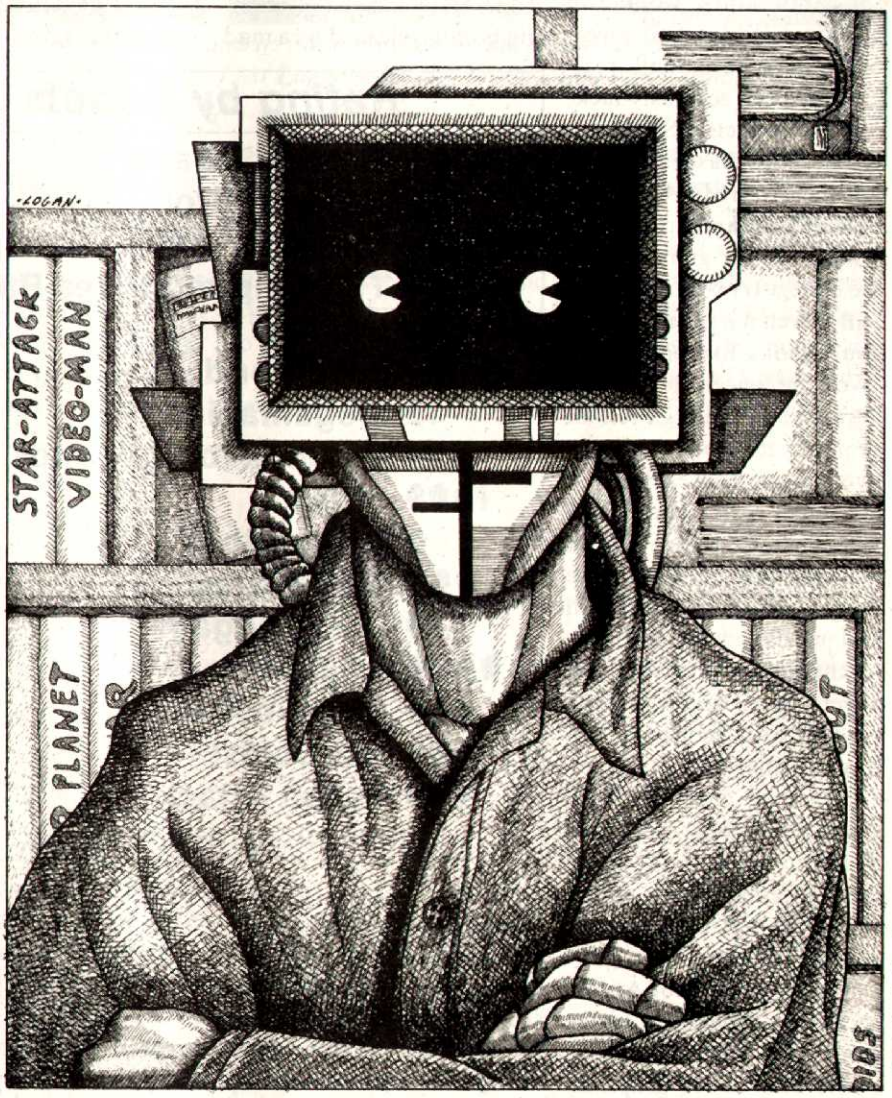


Illustration by Ron Logan

How did I get myself into such a fix? Let me back up a bit and try to explain. A couple of years earlier, as features editor of *Gambling Times,* I had discovered the fascination and pleasure of playing games for cash. I had always played games—from Parcheesi to Pong—but I'd never experienced the excitement of the gambling life until I took up backgammon and won a few small tourneys. Soon I learned to count and challenge Las Vegas casinos at blackjack, found a bookie and started betting sports, and became a regular in a Friday night poker game.

Ah, but then in the spring of 1981,

Roger Dionne's next book should be titled Real Men Don't Play Video Games.

along came Pac-Man, the most intoxicating game of all. Investing god knows how many quarters in that puckish yellow dot, I learned patterns, ate fruit, hit 50,000, 100,000. I got past the terrible ninth key. I reached 200,000 and still my appetite wasn't sated. In his book *Score! Beating the Top 16 Video Games,* Ken Uston refers to a Las Vegas poker player who tests his concentration by playing several games of Pac-Man before heading to the casino for an evening at the tables. That player is me. (Uston actually wrote, "If he does well he goes out to play poker; if he does poorly, he goes home."—Ed.)

Which brings me back to the happy dilemma of having to write two books in a matter of three months. I moved the television set from the living room to my office, set up a large table in front of it, and went to work on the video book. My starry-eyed plan was to do ten games a day, spending 45 minutes playing and mastering each game and another 45 minutes writing it up—a 15-hour work day every day, including weekends. Silently, steadfastly, enclosed like a troll in my dungeon-office, I zapped aliens, scrambled through mazes, eluded dragons, took on computer blackjack dealers, tennis players and chess opponents, made notes—the black Angus in Stampede appears after you rope two Herefords; the ball in Breakout changes angles after the seventh hit—and wrote and wrote and wrote. Day and night, already ill-defined in Las Vegas, became a single, fuzzy blur. I worked all the time, ate only when I was hungry, slept only when I was tired.

After a few weeks I began to feel detached. Life was something for people out there beyond my television set and typewriter, for people who somehow had time to converse, laugh, date, go shopping, do the laundry. A simple stop at the mailbox became a kind of revelation: From there I could see people actually lying out by the pool and the jacuzzi, doing absolutely nothing but soaking up the sun, reading a novel, drinking a beer, talking to one another. How was it possible? It seemed like something I had known only in another incarnation.

My isolation from society drove me to the Tropicana, the Desert Inn, the Castaways, where I played poker. Residing in Las Vegas was a big plus in this respect. In Hoboken or Topeka or even Los Angeles or New York, whom do you call at midnight? Where do you go besides the all-night diner at 4 a.m.? Ah, but in Las Vegas there is always a poker game.

Once I sat down at a full table of seven-card stud at the Castaways, I became lost in the game's ebb and flow. I'd play for two hours, six hours, 10 hours. Poker provided me with everything my solitary, workaholic existence lacked—company, camaraderie, relaxation, ego gratification, instant reward and, sometimes, when I played badly, instant punishment.

There was something else, too. I'd been playing games all day that were locked inside the TV screen. They were distant. It's true I was participating. Indeed, I was making things happen with my buttons and joysticks. Yet I was not *of* the game. There was always a surrogate taking my place out there on the screen so that I was as much a spectator as a player. On the other hand, poker was a *real* game. I was totally involved, a total part of the action, and—notwithstanding the luck factor—I was total master of my fate. There was something almost sensual about the feel of the cards when I received them and the chips as I stacked them, divided them, shuffled them and stacked them again. Most of all, there was the bright, exciting clash of my mind and my abilities against those of seven other human beings. These things, I now have the temerity to aver, no video game can provide.

Meanwhile, something *was* happening back in the electronic battle-zone of my office. I had expected that writing the book would be a chore to get done, a product to be uniformly manufactured—one game description popping out of my typewriter every hour and a half as regularly as Big Macs off a McDonald's grill. For better or worse, that's not the way it worked out. Some games, usually the worst of them, did take 45 minutes or less to digest, but any game worth its salt took considerably longer. It was usually easy enough to master the mechanics of games I'd never played, but learning to play them well was another matter. One simply does not master Atari's Superman, Imagic's Star Voyager or N.A.P.'s Great Wall Street Fortune Hunt in 45 minutes. One is lucky if he's adept at them after two or three hours. What's more, I was working under the decided disadvantage that so many of the games were fun to play. After I'd played Activision's Freeway, N.A.P.'s K.C. Munchkin or Astrocade's Galactic Invasion long enough to feel I could write a competent analysis of it, I found myself nevertheless playing it again and again and again, determined to better my high score, to overcome another hurdle and yet another and another. I persuaded myself I was doing further research, but mostly I was having fun.

Then there was the writing. Little

"Silently, steadfastly, enclosed like a troll in my dungeon-office, I zapped aliens, scrambled through mazes, eluded dragons, took on computer blackjack dealers, made notes, and wrote and wrote and wrote. Day and night, already ill-defined in Las Vegas, became a single fuzzy blur."

300-to-400-word descriptions. Nothing to them. Zip. Zip. Zip. But, no, that's not the way it was. Somewhat to my surprise, the writing too became enormous fun, and when writing is fun—for me at least—it is time-consuming. With very few exceptions, each entry became a little essay, a literary five-finger exercise which I worked at lovingly, painstakingly, I'd even dare say artfully, I didn't just write. I molded, revised, pared, polished, searched for *le mot juste.* At the same time, many of the descriptions grew to 600, 1,000 1,500 words and longer. N.A.P.'s Conquest of the World led to a brief treatise on games and social attitudes. Mattel's Major League Baseball became a panegyric on the summer game. But mostly I simply fell in love with what I was doing.

"Great writing," I told a barfly over drinks at the time, "can appear in a book on video games as surely as it can in a novel or a poem."

He nodded in agreement like only a

(Continued on page 82)

GAMER FEEDBACK

RIP IT OUT, or photocopy it. But let us know what you want to see and read. This is your magazine, Video Gamer, and you can be a part of VIDEO GAMES by taking a few minutes (when you're not saving the earth from total annihilation) to fill out the questionnaire below. The next issue of VIDEO GAMES will continue to report the Video Gaming news and views that interest you.

Please return to: **VIDEO GAMES Magazine, 350 Fifth Avenue, Room 6204, New York, New York 10118**

Sex: Male___ Female___ Age:___
Family Income: Under $14,000___ $14-21,000___ $21-39,000___ Over $40,000___
Education: Elementary School___ High School___ College___ Master's___ PhD___
Occupation (if none, list parents'): _____

Favorite Department in this issue: _____
Favorite Feature article: _____
What I'd like to see less of: _____
_____
What I'd like to read most about: _____
_____

How does this issue of *VIDEO GAMES* compare to previous ones?
The same___ Better___ The Best!___ No comment___
Why? _____

GAMER SECTION

Favorite form of play: Arcade games___ TV-games___ Computer games___

Favorite arcade games	Favorite cartridges	Favorite computer games
1 _____	1 _____	1 _____
2 _____	2 _____	2 _____
3 _____	3 _____	3 _____

How much money do you spend on arcade games (average per week)? _____
Which TV-game system do you own? _____
How many cartridges do you have? _____

Do you own a home computer? Yes___ No___
If yes, which one? _____

If no, are you thinking of buying one? Yes___ No___
If yes, which one? _____

Finally, we come to that time again when all good gamers must speak their minds. What Great Ideas and Concepts do you have for New Games? _____
_____
_____
_____
_____

COIN-OP SHOP

I Can't Believe I Wrote About Pinball

By Eugene Jarvis

"You know what I hate about video games . . .?"

It's Sunday night and Andy Rooney is bitching again. Pre-Monday manic depression is setting in. No wonder Rooney is always whining on "Sixty Minutes." It's time to hyperspace to some new coordinates.

I'm jaded and burnt out, and I need a rush. Sex, drugs or video will do. The first two, I conclude, are out—too many side effects. And no TV game will satisfy me now. I need the high-tech high, the newest of the new to lift me from my Sunday night blues.

Inevitably, I find myself in the local Spaceland in search of the newest of the new. Is Kangaroo by Atari *it?* Midway's Tron? Hmmm . . . let's see. Right off, **Kangaroo** looks a lot like Donkey Kong, the game that cost me my last real job. Basically, it's the same idea as DK except you're not an Italian plumber rescuing his sister, but a mommy kangaroo retrieving Junior. Start at the bottom and work your way up the usual platforms, ramps and ladders to Junior at the top. There's no Kong to tangle with, just scads of nasty monkeys (baby Kongs?). The control is also similar to DK's, but with a twist. Pushing up on the six-way stick causes you (Mommy) to leap-up, upper-right to leap-right, upper-left to leap-left. Left is left, right is right and down is duck, which is particularly useful for avoiding fastball apples pitched by the monkeys. The incorporation of the jump function into the joystick is a neat trick—it simply *feels* nice. Next to the joystick is a "Punch" feature which allows you to deal knockout blows to the monkeys with the press of a button. This is definitely the funnest part of the game.

MR. & MRS. PINBALL: After all is said and done, this is one helluva way to play Pac-Man.

Once you're able to master the controls and elementary monkey psychology, the first two rounds are a cakewalk. There are three ways the monkeys get you: They throw apples at you, drop apple cores and run into you. Since you can always punch them out, there's no excuse for running into the devils. Jump over the low tosses and duck the high ones. As for the apple cores, watch out—they sometimes will take a strange bounce or two. During the first two rounds, it's fun to hang around and deck a few extra monkeys and cores for points. But don't loiter too long—that's when Apollo Creed comes out and spars with you. Time to move along.

The third round is the killer. Here, we find Junior sitting up in a cage atop a totem pole of monkeys. The idea is to one-by-one knock the monkeys out from underneath the cage—which lowers it—and then jump in to save Junior. Sounds easy, right? No way. With these monkeys constantly sneaking back under the cage almost as fast as you can punch 'em out, it can get pretty frustrating. But if you can float like a butterfly and sting like a bee, and bob and weave your way through the numerous apples and cores, you can be a hero.

After the fourth round, which is like the first two just meaner, it's back to the beginning. Kangaroo is a jolly good frolic in the old outback, but complete all the rounds once and why play 'em again? The champ is warm and ready for his next conquest.

Tron. The movie, the hype, the game. Imagine . . . racing light cycles, battling tanks, encountering the beastly MCP (Master Control Program) on

Dr. Eugene Jarvis designed and programmed such pins as Firepower, Superman and The Atarians before he saw the light.

a three-dimensional electronic landscape. I move in for a closer look. No 3-D landscapes here; rather, the game is flat as a board. Then what are all these people crowded around for? I wait my turn. Soon enough, I'm up.

The first thing you do is select one of four phases to play with the glowing joystick. By moving a dot into the blue sector, I'm transcended where spider-like bugs reproduce and roam. Use the joystick to manuever the trigger to

19-44-72, TUT: If you like shooting cobras and gorillas and gathering treasure in Egyptian tombs with a joystick that's a real drag, then this game's for you.

shoot and the rotary knob on the left to aim. The grid bugs are simple. Wipe them out and escape into the Input-Output Tower before the timer runs down. No real challenge here. Next, I go for the green and find myself inside the MCP. The object is to reach the Cone of Light by knocking out cylinder blocks Breakout-style. The catch is that the blocks scroll left to right, so shoot them on the left first. That's easy, too. I even get a 1000 point bonus for wiping out all the blocks, C'mon, Tron—the champ's getting ornery.

In phase three I'm riding a blip that is supposed to be a light cycle, trying to cut off a bad-guy. It's a lot like the Atari VCS cartridge Surround, except that you get to use your trigger as a speed control. The bad-guy is slow and dumb, and in no time I've got him in a box.

The last phase of level one is the tank battle. Pretty much your basic tank game, here the joystick moves your tank, the rotate knob aims your turret, and the trigger fires. The playfield consists of a rectangular maze with a diamond-shaped center warp zone (aka, "random relocator") which hyperspaces you to a random place when you move into it. It takes three shots to kill Sark's bad-guy blue tanks, while they need just one to do you in. Hide behind corners and pick the enemy tanks off with rebound shots, or duck into an aisle and get off three quick shots and get out. Don't get caught on the same aisle with an enemy tank for an extended period of time or you won't be able to avoid its fire. Like all the other first level phases, tank is a joke. I ambush him with three quick shots. On to level two.

Though I pick blue, to my surprise there are no grid bugs in sight. Instead, three tanks are barrelling in my direction. Evidently, the color choice has nothing to do with game selection in level two. When you choose a color, you're just assigned a game at random. Why bother with the selection phase then? In any event, level two is tougher than the first, but not by much. Again, the MCP and bug sequences are walk-overs, but facing three tanks or three light cycles at once can be a little hairy for the neophyte. The trick to handling the light cycles is not to try to box the bad-guys in, but box yourself in. Just build a little box for yourself and eat up the territory at slow speed, while the bad-guys burn themselves out. The

WOOFER OF THE YEAR: A dog to end all dogs, Caveman is simply low-grade video married to firewood pinball. Torch it and run.

tanks are trickier though. Remember to shoot around corners and get off those three shots bam-bam-bam. And avoid getting caught in long corridors without exits.

Level three is when the amateurs start heading for the showers. The bugs are no sweat, but the cone becomes tough to crack. It really gets

The Movie, The Hype, Another Review

Tron is a movie made by computers, about computers, for humans. It is the first of its genre—a journey through the CRT looking glass into the electronic realm. The action takes place at Encom, a massive computer conglomerate (Atari or Apple?) that was OK in the good old days but has become so large and nebulous that no one knows what's really going on except for bad guy Sark/Dillinger (David Warner) and his megalomaniac Master Control Program (MCP). Throw in your basic All-American maverick, good-guy Han Solo-type (Flynn, played by Jeff Bridges), plus a nice-guy conformist Luke Skywalker (Allen "Tron" Bradley, played by Bruce Boxleitner) that ends up with the gorgeous, but simple-minded girl (Lora, played by Cindy Morgan). How can you miss? *Star Wars* in a computer. The good guys versus the bad guys at the Silicon Corral.

The acting, plot, and screenplay can be summed up in one statement: thank God for computer-generated graphics. Instead of constructing a set with brick and mortar, the world of *Tron* is built with pixels and computer algorithms. The result—i.e., the incredible Light Cycle, Solar Sailor and MCP action sequences—is something quite out of this world.

While it's a pity that the screenwriters picked the obsolete computer-as-menace story line, at least they were faithful to the facts. Big computer systems really are boring, and for that matter so are the people running them. But *Tron* shows us that computers don't have to be boring anymore. The computer has abandoned the lab for the realm of the imagination. I can't wait to trade my armrest for a joystick.

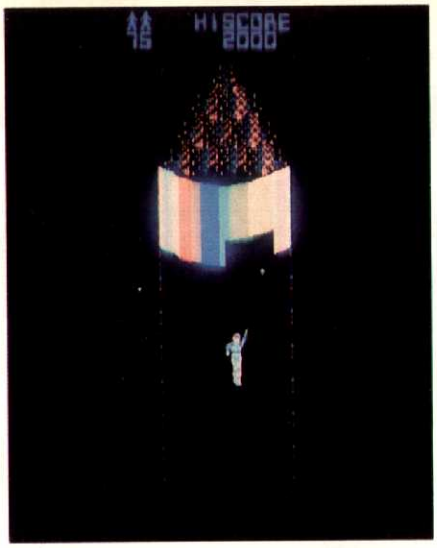
—*E. P. J.*

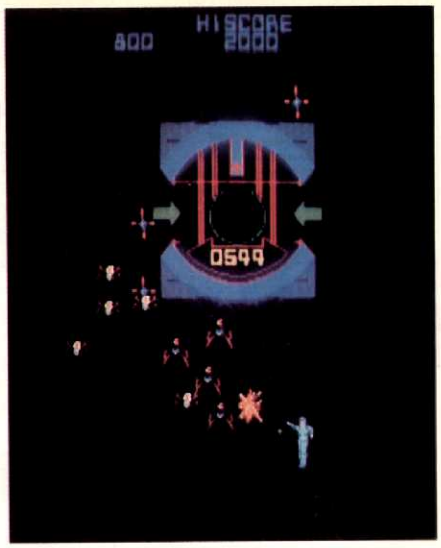
moving and the motion is reversed, right to left this time. Box yourself in and the light cycles can still be had. However, facing six or seven tanks at once may not be suicide, but it's damn close. Only pros and masochists should pass beyond this point.

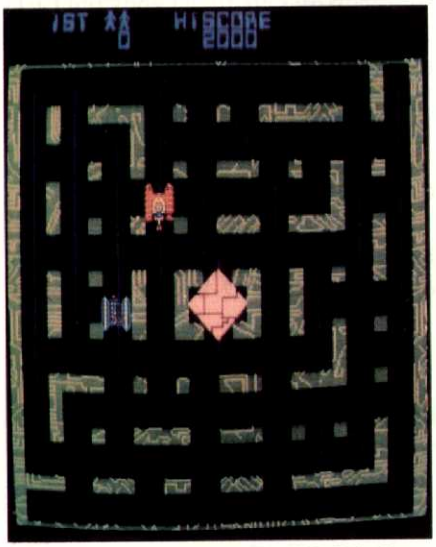
All in all, Tron is a little disappointing: Four mediocre, recycled games in new clothes are just not my definition of excitement. But, it's the packaging that counts, not the substance, right? Why waste precious corporate resources to create a good game when you're already paying top dollar to Disney for the name, right? But wait a minute! If this game is so bad, why am I playing it so much? Am I really having fun, or do I just *think* I'm having fun? In this era of Corporate Video, it's really hard to tell.

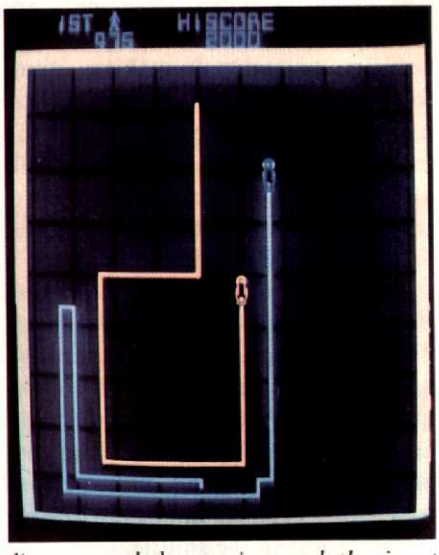
So what about **Tut** (aka, Tutankham), Konami's latest invention, brought to us by Stern? If you like shooting cobras and gorillas, and gathering treasure in Egyptian tombs, then this may be the game for you. Use the left-hand joystick to move around in the maze, and fire a laser to the left or right with your right-hand stick. Why you can't fire up or down is a mystery to me. Lookout! A puff of smoke and four cobras are after me. I blast 'em with my bidirectional laser and grab the first treasure—a bucket full of diamonds worth 250 points. Not bad!

To get from the top to the bottom of the maze, there's a warp gate, a sort of space-age Roman arch that moves you to a companion gate in another part of the chamber. Be careful here—the gorillas like to hang out under these arches. And keep an eye out for the gorillas, cobras, and other heebie-jeebies. Touch one and you're fried, Berzerk-style. Also, be sure to avoid vertical passageways when enemies are close; since you can only shoot left or right, you're defenseless here. Oops! I just went for a treasure, and I'm stuck in a vertical shaft, and an ape is trying to sit on me. But I'm tough. Tough enough to reach for my "flash" button and zap every last slithering devil on the screen into eternity. That was close, but I've shot my wad and won't get another "flash" on this man. Now I pick up a key, to unlock a door and journey to the next tomb.









ONE FOR CORPORATE VIDEO: Four mediocre, recycled games in new clothes is not exactly the author's idea of a swell time. But if Tron is so disappointing, then why is he playing it so much?

In the final analysis, Tut is fun to play but gets downright boring after awhile. Not only is the game repetitious, the joystick is a real drag. You can never stay in one spot without jockeying back and forth; release the joystick and you continue moving in the previous direction. No good.

I'm getting desperate in my quest for the newest of the new, the spacier space, the ultimate rush. With all the new videos played out, I find myself scanning the latest pinball lineup. Is pinball dead? Does anyone care? I used to play a lot of pinball in my former days and it was damn exciting. The only problem is that video came along and blew everyone's mind with the infinite possibilities of an electronic graphic display. But, for nostalgia's sake, I decide to give the ol' plunger a pull.

Is Midway's new pinball game—**Mr. and Mrs. Pac-Man**—just another cheap attempt to capitalize on *the* fad, or is it a real game? The playfield is your typical one-level pinball game with a few nice twists. With a neat shot around the left side you land in a hole which kicks you into a mini-playfield with its own flipper and drop-target bank. There's a Pac-Man drop-target bank in the center of the playfield that has lots of good shots and a nifty skill shot right off the ball plunger to a hidden hole kicker worth mucho good karma. Too bad this shot is all but impossible. The basic idea, of course, is to keep the ball in play, knock down as many drop-targets as you can, and get the ball into as many holes as possible (except the one between the flippers).

"But, when do we play Pac-Man, Uncle Eugene?" Ok, ok—I was just getting to that. Now if you do everything right, kids, and then send the ball

(Continued on page 82)

HARD SELL

Introducing Emerson's Arcadia-2001

By Sue Adamo

At a time when TV-gamers are busily sorting out which new software company is making games for which established system and perhaps deciding whether to purchase the much-publicized ColecoVision as well, along comes the Arcadia-2001, courtesy of Emerson Radio Corporation. Who? What? When? Huh?

Emerson's director of marketing Barry Brittman explains: "What we did after taking a long look at the TV-game market is come up with a high-quality system that combines the playability of Intellivision and the low price of Atari's Video Computer System (VCS). It is very important that we don't get lost in the shuffle."

If Emerson can get the $200 (list price) 2001 to the stores this fall and manage to make a profit on a suggested $99 sale price, then the company could have a hit on its hands. But this is down the road a bit. First, the public has to determine whether this sixth TV-game (following the VCS, Astrocade, Odyssey², Intellivision and ColecoVision) is up to snuff. I had the privilege to test one of the first 2001s to roll off the assembly line. Here's what I found:

Hardware

That long look at the market Emerson took is evident the moment you set eyes on the Arcadia-2001. Sleek and handsome like Intellivision (the black plastic and walnut finish box measures 11½ by seven inches and is three inches deep), it has neat storage slots for the two hand controllers (Intellivision) and an opening on top in which cartridges snugly fit (VCS, Odyssey²). Just below that opening are five buttons marked reset, select, option, start and power. To Emerson's credit, a handy red LED light lets you know at a glance whether the power is on or not. The 2001 is also lighter and more compact than its predecessors.

Controls

Again, comparisons are in order. Long and narrow with firing buttons on either side, a 12-key keypad, overlays and a multi-directional disc . . . how could you *not* compare these controllers to Intellivision's? What's different about them? Well, you can attach a joystick to the center of the disc if you wish. Not a bad idea at all.

Software

In a "Cartridge Chart" Emerson included with its other publicity materials, 24 different games for the 2001 are listed. Each one is briefly described and then compared to a particular TV-game or games. Missile War is Missile Command, Ocean Battle is Sea Battle, Space Vulture is Phoenix or Demon Attack and so on (see chart). Only Emerson's five Japanese arcade licenses—Pleiades, Red Clash, Jungler, Spiders and Funky Fish—are spared this indignity. Even though it's helpful to know what's what, I'm troubled by the company's lack of imagination. Its lab of hackers seems to have spent too much time copying popular games and too little time coming up with new ones.

In some cases, however, Emerson's hackers have created truly exciting renditions of original titles. Baseball, Soccer and American Football are good examples of this. But, in others,

American Football and Space Attack are just two of the 24 cartridges available for the Arcadia-2001. Licenses for arcade games such as Pleiades and Spiders will also be included in the Arcadia line-up.

there are unnecessary hardships, such as a time limit in Alien Invaders (three guesses for which game this one is "different but competitive to"), which make for less enjoyable play. Continuing on the negative side, most of the arcade-type games are inexplicably one-player only, and the menu of variations leaves something to be desired, especially for those with hearty video appetites.

Cartridge Reviews

A first-rate cousin of Mattel's Major League Baseball, Emerson's **Baseball** allows you to control all nine players on the field at once simply by depressing the corresponding button on the mylar overlay and then maneuvering the player with the disc.

Here's a neat trick: When a ball is hit to the outfield, an enlarged picture of that area of the field appears on the screen until either the fielder catches it, it passes over the wall (home run!) or it falls to the video turf. The field then returns to full size.

* * *

Despite its name, **Tanks A Lot** is a good game, pitting your so-called Bazooka Man against a fleet of deadly tanks. The blue tank is your most mobile opponent; its main objective is to destroy your Commanding Base Vehicle. Meanwhile, four yellow tanks aim primarily for Bazooka Man.

At the highest level of difficulty (there are four mazes) the yellow tanks multiply to eight while the blue tank reappears five seconds after it is destroyed.

There are four variations, offering warp and barrier powers with options for warping the Command Base Vehicle to up to four different locations. Tanks also has a "freezing" feature—just press the freeze key on the right-hand controller and the game grinds to a halt until you decide to resume play.

Atari's Combat is kindergarten compared to Tanks A Lot. In the latter, the fire from both your Bazooka Man and the tanks can whittle the mazes down to an alarmingly small number of bricks, whereas the combat field remains solid throughout. But, lest we forget, combat is a freebie. (The 2001 comes cartridgeless.)

* * *

Cat Trax is listed as competitive to Pac-Man, N.A.P.'s K.C. Munchkin

(Continued on page 70)

THE CARTRIDGE CHART

GAME	DESCRIPTION	COMPETITIVE TO
Alien Invaders***	one player, space attack	Space Invaders, Atari Space Armada, Mattel Alien Invaders-Plus, NAP
American Football***	two players, 11-man action	Football—Atari, NAP NFL Football, Mattel
Baseball**	two players, 9-man action	Home Run, Atari Baseball, NAP Major League Baseball, Mattel
Brain Quiz*	two players, three games: Mindbreaker, Maxit & Hangman	Brain Games, Hangman, Atari
Breakaway***	two players, break thru walls	Super Breakout, Atari Breakdown, NAP
Cat Trax***	one player, maze, four games	Pac-Man, Atari Night Stalker, Mattel
Capture*	two players, strategy	Othello, Atari Revenge, Mattel Dynasty, NAP
Escape***	one player, maze/ shooting, four games	Berzerk, Atari
Funky Fish***	LICENSED ARCADE GAME	
Grand Slam Tennis***	two players	Tennis—Mattel, Activision
Jungler***	LICENSED ARCADE GAME	
Missile War**	one player, missile attack	Missile Command, Atari
Ocean Battle**	two players, war/shooting	Sea Battle, Mattel
Pleiades***	LICENSED ARCADE GAME	
Red Clash***	LICENSED ARCADE GAME	
Soccer**	two players	Pele's Soccer, Atari NASL Soccer, Mattel Soccer/Hockey, NAP
Spiders***	LICENSED ARCADE GAME	
Space Attack***	one player, shooting, two games	Space Invaders, Atari Space Armada, Mattel
Space Mission***	one player, shooting	Star Voyager, Imagic Starmaster, Activision
Space Raiders***	one player, shooting	Defender, Atari
Space Vulture***	one player, space attack, three games	Phoenix, Atari Demon Attack, Imagic
Star Chess**	two players, chess/space, shooting	(no comparison)
Tanks A Lot***	two players, battle/shooting	Combat, Atari
3-D Bowling**	two players	Bowling—Atari, NAP PBA Bowling, Mattel

*Key: Asterisks indicate price. * is $19.95, ** is $29.95, *** is $39.95. All cartridges are already available except for Funky Fish, Grand Slam Tennis, Red Clash and Pleiades. Those should be in stores by Christmas.*

If you have difficulty locating the 2001 at a retailer near you, write: Emerson Radio Corp., One Emerson Lane, Secaucus, N.J. 07094.

Intellivision

(Continued from page 34)

more memorable and popular than others. (Hotwheels, for example, sold rapidly among the toddler set; Creepy Crawlers and other Incredible Edibles—rubbery "bugs" kids could manufacture in something called a "Thingmaker" and then consume—were less appealing, at least to parents.) Generally, Mattel's growth continued relatively unabated as it built a trusted name in children's products.

* * *

The year is 1976. Firms with such high-tech handles as Intel, National Semiconductor and Texas Instruments are stamping out tiny squares of silicon—integrated circuit chips—each no bigger than a man's fingertip. Portable electronics suddenly has arrived on the scene, and Mattel and a whole slew of brand new companies rush to buy up the chips and put them in pocket-sized, plastic-shelled games that blip and beep and light up but don't do much else. The first generation of electronic hand-held sports games from Mattel are the first to hit toy store shelves—baseball and football sell particularly well. Overnight, an electronic games industry emerges with profits surging to over one-half billion dollars by Christmas, '77. The wildfire growth continues through '79. During this period, Mattel's revenues leap from $493.6 million to $805.1 million. The games are so successful that Mattel Electronics Inc. is spun off as a separate operating division.

In 1980, Mattel releases a line of second-generation sports and action games that play much better than the first hand-helds, and have better graphics and more realistic game concepts. But as Christmas approaches, so does an industry crisis: there are too many games on the shelves, far too many for the public to absorb. Prices drop. Inventory gathers dust at the stores. The bottom falls out of the market and many companies close their doors. Mattel takes a beating, as electronic games, already accounting for 15 percent of the company's business, depress total profits to $7.9 million in fiscal 1981 (ending January 31) from the prior year's $30.6 million.

"We invented the portable electronics game category," boasts Pirner. "But everyone jumped in and overproduced. The vagaries of the market are sometimes hard to read."

DRUMMING UP BUSINESS: About Mattel's decision to produce games for the VCS, marketing v.p. Peter Pirner (left) says, "It's not that we're so clever. We know we can make better games than Atari can for its own system."

Some competitors don't see it quite that way. "Mattel was the culprit of the hand-held disaster," says one marketing vice-president. "First, it overproduced more than anyone else, then it overpriced its products and turned consumers off." Responds Pirner: "It certainly wasn't just Mattel that was having problems. Everyone got greedy."

In any event, portable games ushered Mattel into the electronic age. They also created a vital, new, previously non-existent audience for Mattel products: adults. Faced with an aging baby boom generation and the prospect of declining birth rates, once again someone at Mattel was taking pretty accurate notes. Enter Intellivision.

* * *

The television is the key," Bill Gillis, vice-president of marketing for Intellivision, told an auditorium crowded with hopeful retailers at the Consumer Electronics Show (CES) last winter. "The idea behind Intellivision is to take something people are very familiar and comfortable with—TV—but are accustomed to dealing with in a pansive manner, and make them react to it. Intellivision will condition people for the future, for when television will be a primarily interactive device."

When Mattel unveiled its high-priced ($299 list) Intellivision Master Component at CES two winters earlier, the reviews were mixed. Certain industry analysts, noting the growing home computer trend, expressed reservations about the games-only system, while others insisted that Mattel had a clear shot at challenging Atari's virtually uncontested TV-games reign.

No one, however, questioned the quality of the actual system. In fact, after sampling a number of cartridges, *Newsweek* couldn't help but quip, "But can this thing walk the dog?" NFL Football came complete with a choice of 160 different plays. Major League Baseball allowed for stolen bases, hit-and-run, pick-offs and double plays. In NHL Hockey, a referee could blow his whistle on a number of infractions, in which case the player charged skated over to the appropriate penalty box. The dull roar of a crowd further enhanced the game's intended realism.

Intellivision proved to be a great

leap forward for TV-games: It was so effective that some found it too difficult to play. Scoring one goal in hockey, for example, might take an entire afternoon. "That's the point," Pirner contends. "Unlike the VCS, it takes you awhile to find out what you've bought."

Nearly three years later, two-and-a-half million Intellivision owners are probably still trying to figure out what they bought. Executives at Mattel, meanwhile, must be scratching their heads, wondering what on earth it takes to command a heftier chunk of the TV-games action (only 15 percent now). One plan that temporarily quieted Mattel's critics—mating a keyboard component with Intellivision, thus creating a formidable home computer—was only recently postponed for what seemed like the twelfth time.

Pirner concedes that "the heavy competition going on in computer hardware" hastened this latest delay. "If we had gone ahead and introduced the keyboard at the price originally intended ($500), it simply would have died in the marketplace." A revised model should be in the stores some time in '83, Pirner says.

Mattel has had considerably fewer problems getting two other projects off the ground and out the door. The $100 Intellivoice (Voice Synthesis Module), which talks to you when plugged into Intellivision and used with specially made cartridges, will be available this Christmas. So too will a new series of cartridges going under the heading "M Network." But don't try to play them on your Intellivision; these games are stamped Atari VCS only.

Isn't it ironic that Mattel has begun to produce software for its closest rival's hardware—even though 75 percent of TV-games users own the VCS? Peter Pirner doesn't think so. "Although we're in second place, we know we can make better games for the number one company than Atari can for its own system," he brags. "It's not that we're so clever. We just see the market need, like Activision and all those other cartridge companies have done, and decided to address it.

"Some people have said that we're admitting defeat to Atari by doing this. That's ridiculous. Activision, Imagic and Coleco are all starting to ship cartridges for Intellivision. I don't know about you, but I take that as a vote of confidence for Mattel, not a sign of defeat."

Three hundred miles north, up in California's reknowned Silicon Valley, the Atari camp remains smug. "Every time they advertise cartridges for our system," chides an executive, "they'll be contradicting their own ad."

And so the battle goes on. Despite Intellivision's enormous impact in the TV-games field, Mattel's goal to catch Atari may never be realized. But don't tell that to Mattel. Just as this article hit the press, the company announced a month-long $50 rebate program for Intellivision. For the first time, you could buy the system for under $200.

And Plimpton (remember him?) was busy rehearsing the script for Mattel's next prime-time dig at Atari—an ad for Intellivoice. Get this line: "Now you can tell the difference between Intellivision and Atari with your eyes closed." Touché! ▲

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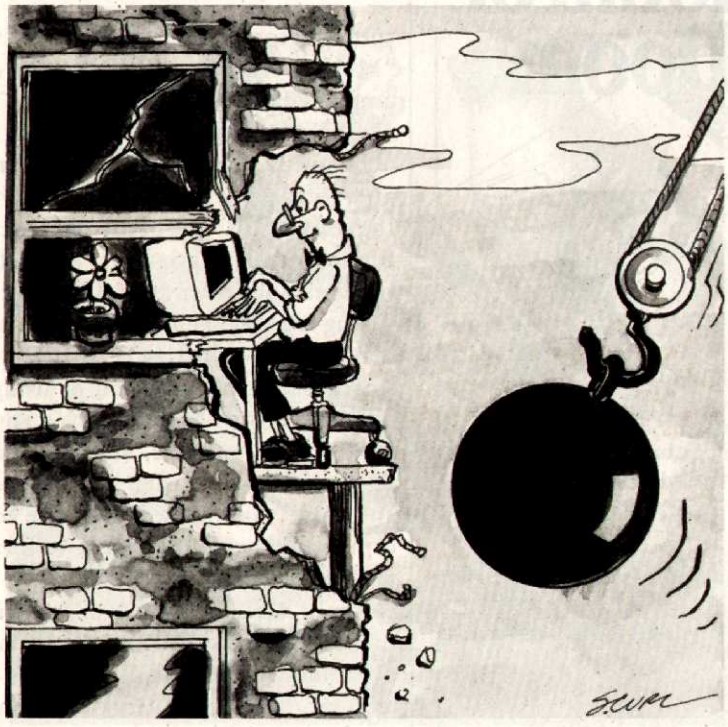

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Hard Sell

(Continued from page 67)

and Mattel's Night Stalker but has more in common with Exidy's Mouse Trap (to be released by Coleco). You're a cat being chased by dogs in a maze. While you collect bits of catnip (dots) a fish randomly appears once per maze. Go for it and then start sending those hostile hounds to the doghouse at the top of the screen for big bonus points. Your cat retains its temporary superpowers for a good half-minute, which allows you to clean up the maze when you're not playing dogcatcher. For those accustomed to the power pill's short life in Pac-Man, this will seem extravagant at first. I've yet to get used to it.

The variations include warp, number of exits and a speedy red dog. One embellishment that Pac-players surely will appreciate is the clock that tells you precisely when your powers are about to disappear.

* * *

Emerson's **Alien Invaders** begins with the refrain from "Sprach Zarathustra"; it is repeated ad nauseum at the start of every game.

These 70 bland, cramped invaders have two unusual powers: they can scroll off one side of the screen and return on the other; and, as they descend, the buildings on which they are perched begin to shrink.

There are no game variations to choose from here. (No invisible invaders? Gasp.) There is, however, that ghastly five-minute time limit I mentioned above. Imagine having just to wipe out the last two aliens on the screen and it goes suddenly blank? I don't know about anyone else, but if I'm going to lose the neighborhood anyway, I'd rather do it playing Atari's infinitely more ingenious version.

* * *

In the Defender department, we have **Space Raiders** (not to be confused with Atari's Star Raiders or Raiders of the Lost Ark). In this explosive free-for-all, you have plenty of reasons to worry: Alien creatures, flying saucers and ground-based missiles are all prepared to reduce you to a cosmic blur. Watch your fuel count and land for petrol when you are running low. Though Atari's Defender has a bigger cast and more interesting tasks and challenges, Space Raiders doesn't pale by comparison.

* * *

The Bazooka Man from Tanks A Lot returns in **Escape,** Emerson's version of Berzerk. In this game of you versus "them," as it is detailed in the brochure, you must "run for your life [you have four of them] and shoot from the hip." Beware the Spinner, a twirling critter that spins for 30 seconds before releasing itself in you-know-who's direction. The Spinner—like its mentor, Evil Otto—can penetrate walls and is indestructible. "They" can fire any number of bullets at you, depending on which variation you choose to play. You can also select how many of "them"—8, 12, 16 or 20—you want to pack the maze with.

Conclusion

With the Arcadia-2001, Emerson has achieved what it seemingly set out to do—deliver a playable TV-game system at an affordable price. Though its games lack originality, there are occasional sparks of innovation to be found. But, for a hundred bucks, who's expecting Picasso? ▲

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Soft Spot

(Continued from page 59)

software for its arch-rival. Titled the "M Network," the results so far are commendable. Astrosmash, one of Mattel's bonafide hits, has been rechristened **Astroblast** for the series and, fortunately, it hasn't lost much in the conversion. One of the better post-Space Invaders variations, Astroblast requires you to fend off a barrage of falling objects including rocks, spinners, pulsars and UFOs. In this version, you have the option of using a paddle controller, which gives you a much faster response, and rapid-fire. Both make play easier and far more enjoyable. Astroblast is a simple concept that happens to be a lot of fun to play. Let's hear it for simplicity.

Space Attack is a welcome addition to the first-person space war genre, even though the three-dimensional effects are rather weak. Only the enemy's fire has depth; the ships remain the same size throughout the battle. Space

Attack has some sophisticated tricks up its sleeve, however. As with its cousin, Space Battle, you get to plot your defensive strategy on a radar map and choose which of your three squadrons will be used in combat. After that's decided, it's off to the intergalactic wars in whatever sector you wish to defend. When one of the enemy fleets closes in on the mothership, a warning siren lets you know you're in trouble and should fight back immediately. Space Attack is a challenging and enjoyable game with fine graphics, but I'm afraid it just doesn't measure up to the state-of-the-art standards set by Activision's Starmaster or Imagic's Star Voyager.

One final point: I strongly disagree with the notion that hit movies should automatically translate into video games. I say this because shortly there will indeed be an abundance of movie-titled games—Atari's Raiders of the Lost Ark, to name just one. This kind of logic escapes me. Except for the instant recognition factor, I can't see how the numerous intricacies that make a multi-million dollar movie successful have anything to do with the nuances that make a video game click. But who am I to judge? Twenty years ago, when I was asked to invest in Xerox, I said, "Who in his right mind would spend a thousand dollars on a copying machine when, for two bucks, you can buy a box of carbon paper?" ▲

Ken Uston

(Continued from page 27)

pened to be in there having a drink. The *New York Post* called it "the first Pac-Man murder."

Uston: I don't defend video games. I really don't give a damn whether they're good or they're bad. The fact is they're here, and you and I are sort of reporting on them. There are so many different ways murders happen, how can you single one out? In Oakland, two guys were racing for a toll booth. One guy cut the other off and the guy who got cut off had a gun in his car so he shot the other guy. In bars people will argue about a women, they'll argue about a ball game, they'll argue about who gets served first. There are psychotics out there. If some pure psychotic is standing in line at a game and slits the throat of a guy cutting in front, well, I think you chalk that up to a human foible rather than to video games. You'll get people killing each other over any dumb thing. The fact that there's been only one Pac-Man murder—maybe that's pretty good. ▲

Programming

(Continued from page 31)

Another feature of APX is its quarterly software contest which carries a $25,000 (cash) grand prize incentive at the end of the year. Every three months, the top 12 programs accepted that quarter are reviewed by some 100 Atari managers. These people evaluate them and decide the first, second and third prize winners in several categories. Winners in the consumer programs category (such as Christensen) can earn up to $3,000 in Atari merchandise. Top prizes in the three remaining categories—education, business applications and system software—are worth up to $2,000 in mer-

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chandise. The total amount of prizes in a year is approximately $100,000.

With the demand for creative game designers and programmers rising steadily, the rewards can be substantial indeed. A century ago, Horace Greely coined the phrase, "Go West, Young Man," as an adage for opportunity. Today, the maxim should simply read, "Go Game Design." ▲

Midway

(Continued from page 55)

belt in the '70s. The games were there and American companies wanted a piece of the action (and still do). Midway, however, had beaten them all to the punch.

But as profitable as this turned out to be, it created frustration for at least one key member of Midway's brain-trust. Just as Pac-Man was about to arrive, a startling development occurred: Engineering v-p John Pasierb announced he was leaving Midway for a non-game related position at Electronic Cash Register. (In the video game business, the engineering vice-president supervises the company's army of designers and programmers.)

"I quit because I wasn't happy with the support I was getting," Pasierb says, adding that Bally just wasn't ready to commit "serious" money to research and development (R&D) at the time. Four months later, Midway's new president Dave Marofske lured Pasierb back, promising that changes would be made.

Marofske wasn't just handing Pasierb a line. He had decided to pour some of the company's windfall profits back into R & D and to give his own designers a fair chance to prove themselves. This, Marofske hoped, would be a shot-in-the-arm to Nutting Associates and Bally's other game design firm Arcade Engineering as well as Midway's own in-house team, which would soon grow to a staff of more than 100 engineers and creative people.

Marofske's plan worked. Nutting responded almost immediately with two hit games, Gorf and Wizard of Wor, and Arcade Engineering came through with Omega Race. Midway itself delivered what many feel is an absolute bomb—Kick-Man, the game in which a man on a unicycle catches balloons on his head. George Gomez, who supervised the project, concedes the game was a failure. "Thematically, it didn't attract people. It didn't really capture anyone's imagination. Kick-Man's just a reaction game. You can't base a whole game on reaction anymore." Not even Hank Ross' eleventh hour addition of a balloon-gobbling Pac-Man could pull Kick-Man through.

Even so, Jarocki believes the game served a purpose. "With Kick-Man we introduced a new hardware system that gave us greater capabilities—more color, more movement and faster action." To Pasierb, however, the secret of a great game is more than just advanced technology. "It has to feel right," claims the engineer.

And what "feels right" for Midway these days? After listening to Kathy Novak rave about the company's latest space game, the answer would have to be Solar Fox. "It has the same speed and feel as Omega Race," says the woman who has test-marketed every Midway project since Pac-Man. "Usually I play the game for a few weeks, but I've been stuck on Solar Fox for over a month."

On the TV-game front, Bally has arranged for Midway to provide CBS with software for that company's recently formed games division (CBS Video Games). The approximately 10 million owners of Atari's Video Computer System will soon have the opportunity to play Midway favorites like Gorf and Wizard of Wor (conversions of Kick-Man, Solar Fox and the Adventures of Robby Roto are scheduled to follow) in the comfort of their living rooms. In addition, Bally has licensed to Commodore, the home computer company, Omega Race and Gorf for play on the VIC-20. Commodore, though, will do all the software work itself.

John Pasierb sees Midway "coming out with very, very advanced state-of-the-art games" in the next five years. "The kind we can build now, but aren't economically feasible yet," he says.

And on the eve of Midway's 25th anniversary, what does coin-op pioneer Hank Ross have to say?

"I make no predictions," he states firmly. "I make no predictions." ▲

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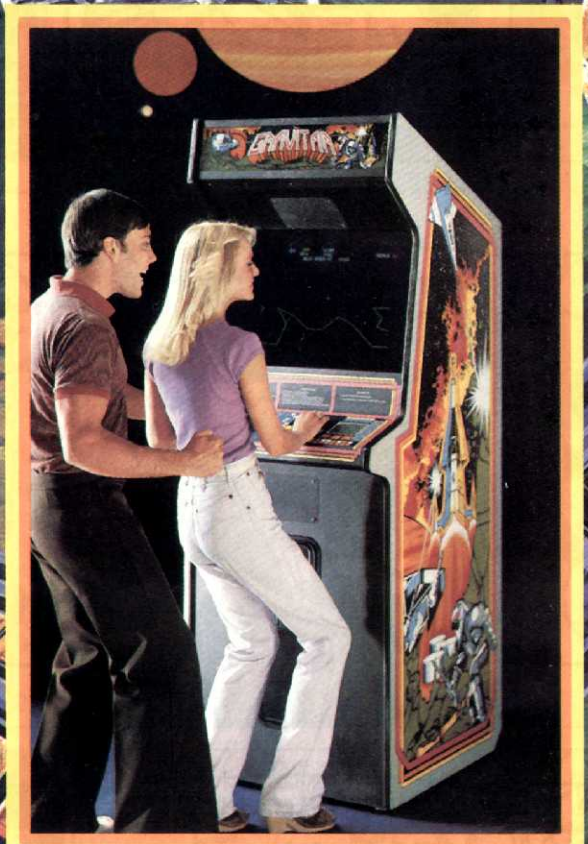

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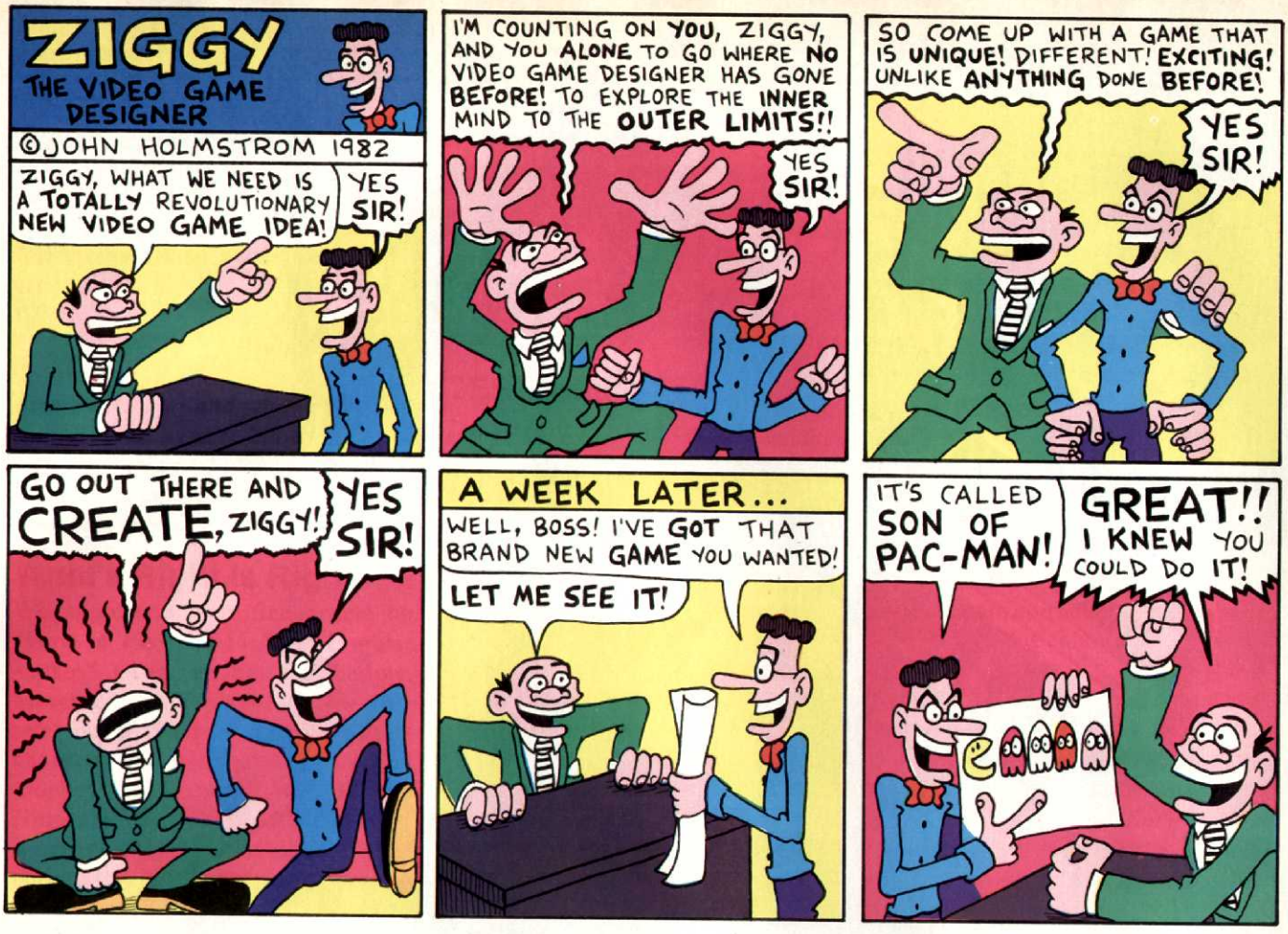

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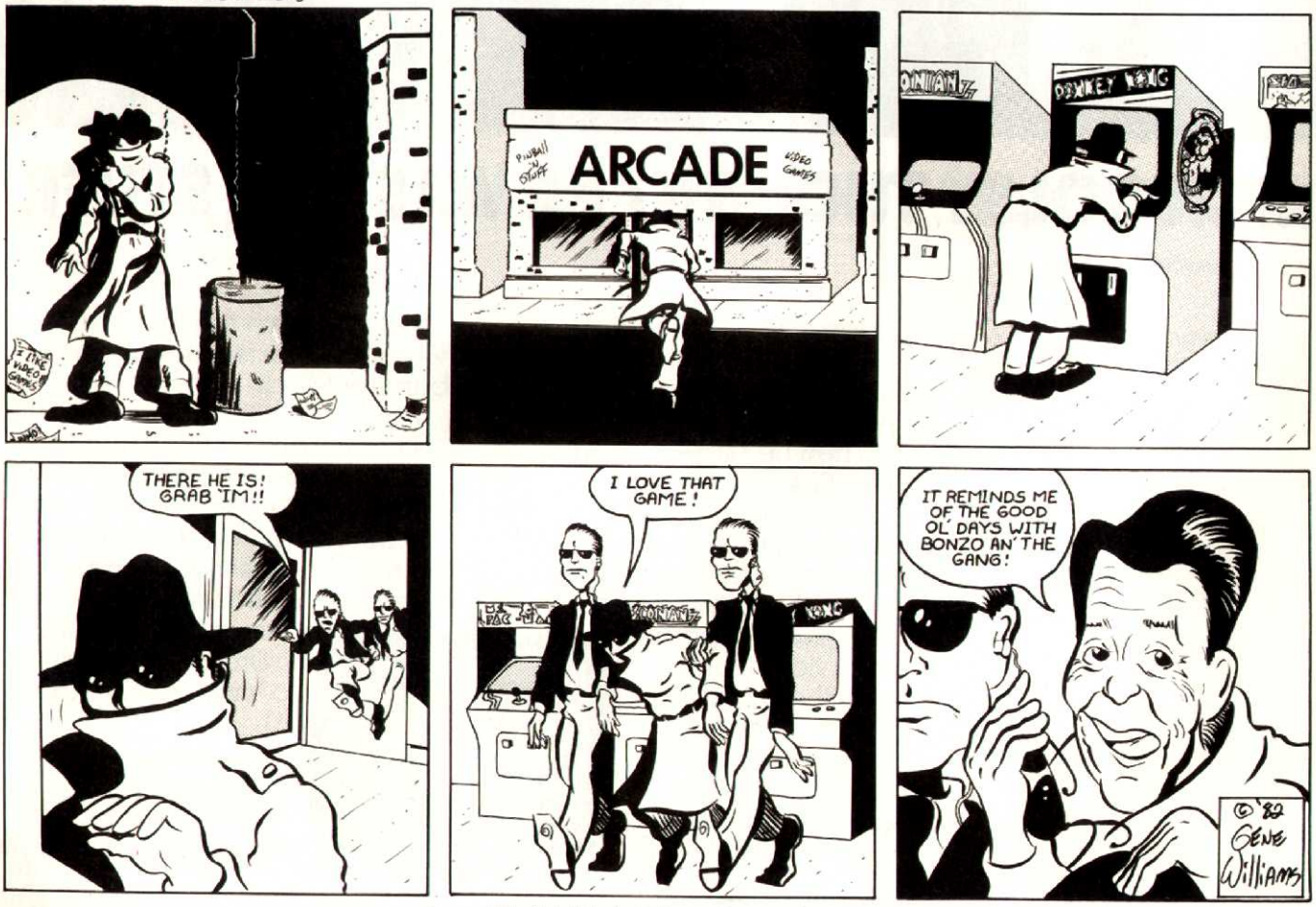

"The Zydroid Legion" will return in our next issue.

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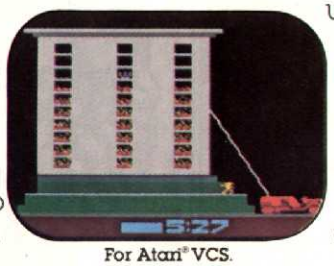

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Double Speak

(Continued from page 12)

more than worth the price just for Space Fortress, Galactic Invasion and Pinball. By the way, can you give me some release dates on the new Astrocade carts?

Robb Hamel
Hamilton, Ohio

Pirate's Chase and Artillery Duel should be out by now. Look for Conan the Barbarian, Solar Conqueror, Cosmic Raiders, Bowling and Soccer sometime this fall.—Ed.

What's Right is Rights

We appreciate your fine article on "How to Play the 15 Most Popular Videos" (Aug. issue). Please note, however, that in this article there is a reference to King Kong. The gorilla character in the subject game is called Donkey Kong and to best preserve Nintendo's valuable trademark rights we request that you delete any reference to this in future articles. There is no connection, authorization, sponsorship, or other association between the Donkey Kong game and the film classic *King Kong* or the producers (or successors) of such film.

Susan Schoenecker
Customer Service Manager
Nintendo of America Inc.
Seattle, Wash.

Don't Hesitate to Ask

Your article on Coleco Vision ("Coleco Has a Vision") interested me. It left some questions in my mind, though. First of all, when will it be available? How much will the Conversion Modules #1 and #3 cost?

Also, you never mentioned what Expansion Module #2 is. I tried to read the box cover on Page 53. It said that it "plays advanced driving and racing games." Could you expand on that? How much will it cost?

Finally, you mentioned that the system includes speed rollers on the controllers. What are they?

Doug Isenberg
Atlanta, Ga.

Module #2 is a steering wheel and accelerator accessory that comes with the Turbo cartridge, all for $90. There is no price yet for Module #3—the keyboard component—though Coleco's president indicated it would go for about $150 when it's released in mid-'83. Turbo is scheduled for October. Everything else should already be available. Finally, the speed rollers are somewhat akin to a Trak Ball. I dare you to ask me what a Trak Ball is.—Ed.

CES Update

Can you please send me information on how I can get some tickets to the next Consumer Electronics Show in Las Vegas? Where in Vegas is it going to be held and when?

Chris Breedon
Irvine, Calif.

The winter CES is scheduled from Jan. 6-9. It takes place in the Las Vegas Convention Center and the Hilton and Jockey Club hotels. If you are in any way involved in consumer electronics as an occupation and can prove it, you're welcome to attend. Admission is free. For more info, write: CES, Two Illinois Center, Suite 1607, 233 N. Michigan, Chicago, Ill. 60601.—Ed.

Mastering Book Beat

As the co-author of a video game book *(The Video Wizard's Handbook)*, I took exception to the Book Beat article ("The Official I-Hate-Video-Games-Books Column") in your Oct. issue. Especially to such comments as: I learned that after playing the game twice (So what? Aren't the books for beginners as well? Would he object to the rules being explained?), and: All these authors are fast-buck artists (What is your magazine doing but trying to cash in on a fad?). At any rate, a *fair* critical review is one thing; this was not. I am confident we will not be lumped into this column.

Keith Sobie
San Francisco, Calif.

That column never pretended to be anything other than it was: unadulterated, one-sided opinion. But if "fair" is what you want, then see the previous Book Beat column ("How-to They

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Do," Aug. issue). We reviewed seven of 'em . . . fair and square.—Ed.

Optic Nerve

In "Ask Doctor Video" (Oct. issue), Dr. Sherman states that for visual problems see your optometrist. Poor advice—an optometrist is not an *eye doctor.* An ophthalmologist is a medical doctor who specializes in eyes.

P. Berger, RN
Leesburg, Fla.

Order Now

I came across the second issue of your magazine and am very glad that I did. The "TV-Games Buyer's Guide" was excellent. In my initial enthusiasm after purchasing an Atari VCS, I bought some carts that I'm not too pleased with. Now I read about carts before making an expensive purchase. I hope your magazine will continue to give information and tidbits on upcoming carts.

Also, I missed your first issue. Will it be possible to order back issues of it?

K. A. Clements
Los Angeles, Calif.

Yes. Send $3.25 to this magazine's address. And thanks for the rave.—Ed.

The $300 Bargain

It was quite obvious Roger Dionne, in his article "The $300 Question: Astrocade or Intellivision?", was personally sold on Intellivision and did not know much about Astrocade. For example, Astrocade is a 4K RAM computer—not ROM as Mr. Dionne stated. It also has three microchips and is endless in its capabilities. It has three built-in games, plus a five-function, 10-memory calculator. Also, by subscribing to the Arcadian newsletter, you are able to learn and share ideas and programs with others. On what other home computer are you able to play music such as "Stars and Stripes Forever"?

Yes, I am sold on my Astrocade and feel $300 is quite a bargain. Please tell Mr. Dionne it is the Cadillac—not the Lincoln—of small home game computers. I know he was comparing the games you can buy and play. Bet he never played Astrocades' Wizard.

JoEllen Reikowski
North Canton, Ohio

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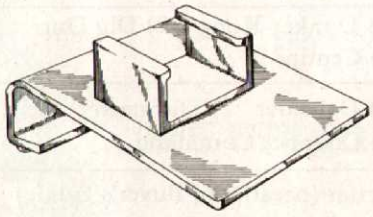

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From Cutoffs to Pinstripes

(Continued from page 50)

Catalyst Group, Bushnell's assembly line for would-be entrepreneurs. "We see the business as a real business of opportunity," Lipkin explains. "Clearly a business that we can make a big contribution to, because we think the technology movement in the business has slowed down significantly in terms of where people are willing to take risks. They're not doing that today. The big corporate mentality of 'Don't rock the boat' has become very widespread in the Valley. Well, I don't believe that that's how great companies get started or really grow.

"Atari was an incredible, incredible story," Lipkin goes on. "And a real credit to the fact that entrepreneurs can succeed, and a credit to hard work. Success comes to those who hustle wisely. I think that Atari really demonstrated that."

The wisest hustlers of them all—at least in this saga—were Nolan Bushnell and Joe Keenan. Rewarded generously by Warner in 1976 (Bushnell cleared $15 million, Keenan $2.2), the duo, as mentioned earlier, immediately turned around and bought the one operating Pizza Time Theatre and the concept for a half-million dollars. Four years later, more than 100 such stores have been opened, and revenues are approaching $75 million. Although Pizza Time's success is similar in many ways to Atari's early growth, Keenan cites what he considers the major differences. "Nolan and I are 10 years older, and therefore our henchmen are 10 years older than they would have been at Atari. There is definitely a difference in how you behave when you're 28 and how you behave when you're 38. So, this company is a little calmer, a little more mature than Atari was, but not a lot."

Keenan, however, is still mischievous enough to take a last shot at Atari. "I'm proud of the fact that already four years after we left they're still growing on absolutely the same products that we put into position. Their big success story has been the VCS—well, that was our concept. We engineered it, we built it, we brought it into the market. I'm actually disappointed that Atari hasn't innovated a thing since we left. If that doesn't change, Atari is going to lose its commanding position, and I might be embarrassed by having been associated with it."

Atari needn't worry for now. It's not about to lose its commanding position in the video games business, especially with George Lucas (Lucasfilm and Atari have agreed on a joint game venture) and McDonald's ("Taste the thrill of Atari at McDonald's") on the company's side.

But there is talk in the Valley about the expiration of Bushnell's non-compete agreement with Atari. Talk may be cheap, but one of Bushnell's confidants, asked recently if "King Pong" has been considering a return to the video game arena, responded firmly: "On October 1, 1983 at 10 a.m. Nolan will have a game on the street." ▲

Gamer Feedback Results

	TALLY WINNERS	MOST UNUSUAL ANSWER
Favorite Department:	1) Coin-op Shop 2) Hard Sell	Shoe Department
Favorite Feature:	1) Coleco Has a Vision 2) TV-Games Buyer's Guide	Reading about guy who died playing Berzerk.
What I'd like to see less of:	Dr. Video Ads not related to video games Comics	Parents who plead with you not to play video games.
What I'd like to read most about:	New systems and software Video game designers	Mario getting athlete's foot. Slim Whitman and his Atari system.
Favorite form of play:	1) TV-games 2) Coin-op games 3) Computer games	
Favorite Arcade games:	1) Donkey Kong 2) Dig Dug 3) Centipede	
Favorite TV-games:	1) Defender 2) Starmaster 3) Chopper Command	
How did Issue Two of *VIDEO GAMES* compare with the first:	Better (because of Buyer's Guide)	
Ideas/concepts for new games:	Get E.T. Home Baby Boom—catch babies dropped by a stork. Alligator—navigate gator through a swamp, chomping frogs and avoiding poachers.	Six-Pac-Man Video Mud Wrestling Puke-Man Attack of the Killer Tomato Microwave the Cat Zap Mr. Rogers Rodney Dangerfield game

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Book Beat

(Continued from page 61)

barfly could.

"There are passages in my book," I asserted, "worthy of comparison to the first sentence of *Pride and Prejudice.*"

A gross exaggeration, I expect, that no doubt caused the Reverend Austin's daughter to smile sardonically from her heavenly cloud. The point—well-taken or not—was this was just the kind of writing I was trying to produce. Hence, on a good day I was lucky to get through not 10 games but four or five. Inevitably, my Apr. 9 deadline had to be extended—first to May 1, then to May 15. At the same time, I obtained an extension for the poker book.

My monastic life continued through April and May. I wondered what it was like to have a drink with an attractive woman, to have dinner out, to have an evening of conversation with old friends over old wine. My world thickened into a soup of blips, bleeps, poker hands, TV dinners, words and more words, the rat-a-tat-tat of missile fire and the rat-a-tat-tat of typewriter keys. As the end approached, I learned of new games being released—Activision's Chopper Command and Star Master, Atari's Berzerk, Intellivision's Star Strike, Parker Brothers' Frogger and The Empire Strikes Back—all of which, of course, had to be included in the book. I also discovered an entire TV-game system, APF Electronics' MP-1000, which I had overlooked when I started the project.

Finally, one morning in late May, to my utter amazement, there was nothing more to do. I crammed a 600-page manuscript covering more than 250 games into a box and Federal-Expressed it to Wayne, Pa. The book was finished.

For two days straight I played poker and won $285. Then, with David Sklansky, I plunged into the poker book. With 180 pages written, I interrupted that book to put together this article. It's already July, and I'm still wondering when I'll again be able to enjoy those amenities I had once known. Someday, hopefully, I'll find out. Unless, of course, there's a sensational new video game to play. Or a good poker game down at the Castaways. ▲

Coin-op Shop

(Continued from page 65)

into one of the Pac-Man qualifying holes, you get to play Pac-Man in a light matrix in the center of the playfield. The bad guy is the red light, and you're yellow. You move with the right flipper and choose the direction with the left. The object is to finish the maze and not get eaten by the red light. Except, of course, if Pac-Man aggressive is lit, which means you can eat the bad guy for 50,000 points! After all is said and done, it's a helluva way to play Pac-Man. Imagine a player paying for the privilege of torturing himself with a maze of rules (like most pins, this baby has more than the IRS) in order to qualify for a single, brief, ultra-lo-res round with the munchies, sans joystick! Obviously, if it's Pac-Man that you're after, you've bit off more than you can chew. But if it's pinball action you're craving, Mr. & Mrs. Pac-Man provides some surprisingly enjoyable thrills and spills.

Caveman by Gottlieb is nearby. This is another basic one-level pinball, but with an alarming twist: stuck right in the top of the playfield, is a video screen. Like all pinball games, you bat a steel ball around with your flippers, but because of the space required by the monitor there ain't a whole lot to shoot at. The real action here—if you could call it that—takes place on the screen. By deftly flipping the ball into either the top right or top left, it dribbles down into a hole. Suddenly, it's video-time. Forget about your flippers and grab that joystick on the top of the cabinet and begin maneuvering your troglodyte in the dinosaur maze. Start running over Brontosauruses, Triceratops, and Pteradactyls, but watch out for the red Tyranosaurus. If he gets you it's game-over Homo Erectus.

Compared to the pinball half of the game, this video action is intriguing. But compared to any *real* video game it's a woofer. Sure, I give Gottlieb credit for having the nerve to come out with the first vidi-pin concept, but a dog is a dog. Caveman is simply low-grade video married to firewood pinball. Does this mean pinball really *is* dead? No, just that Caveman is about 10,000 years late. Oh well, it's Sunday night, and I'm bitching again. ▲

Plimpton

(Continued from page 35)

Intellivision, though.

PLIMPTON: Beyond experimenting with the games Mattel is currently advertising, no. I just don't play. It's too time-consuming.

VG: Have you read any of the video game books?

PLIMPTON: None. That would be more of a time-waster than playing the games.

VG: Some people feel video games are bad for children, that kids are playing the games too much. What do you think?

PLIMPTON: Although I find the sights and sounds of arcades fascinating, I don't go to the arcade parlors, and I'd be very upset if my kids spent a lot of time around them. Parents have to be on guard to prevent over-indulgence, but ultimately I don't feel the games really harm children in any way.

VG: Is there a specific kind of new game you would like to see invented?

PLIMPTON: Yes. I'd like to see games where kids can actually learn useful things while playing them at home. Games could teach you how to ski or how to speak Russian or Chinese or how to fly an airplane or drive a car. The teaching aspect is vastly underdeveloped, but I think we'll start seeing things like this in the next five years.

VG: Last question. Since you've tried your hand at almost every major sport, how do you feel about competing against a video game champion?

PLIMPTON: That's an interesting thought. I just don't know if I could handle it. You have to have a considerable bladder to stand and play these games as long as some of these kids do. That would be very tough. ▲

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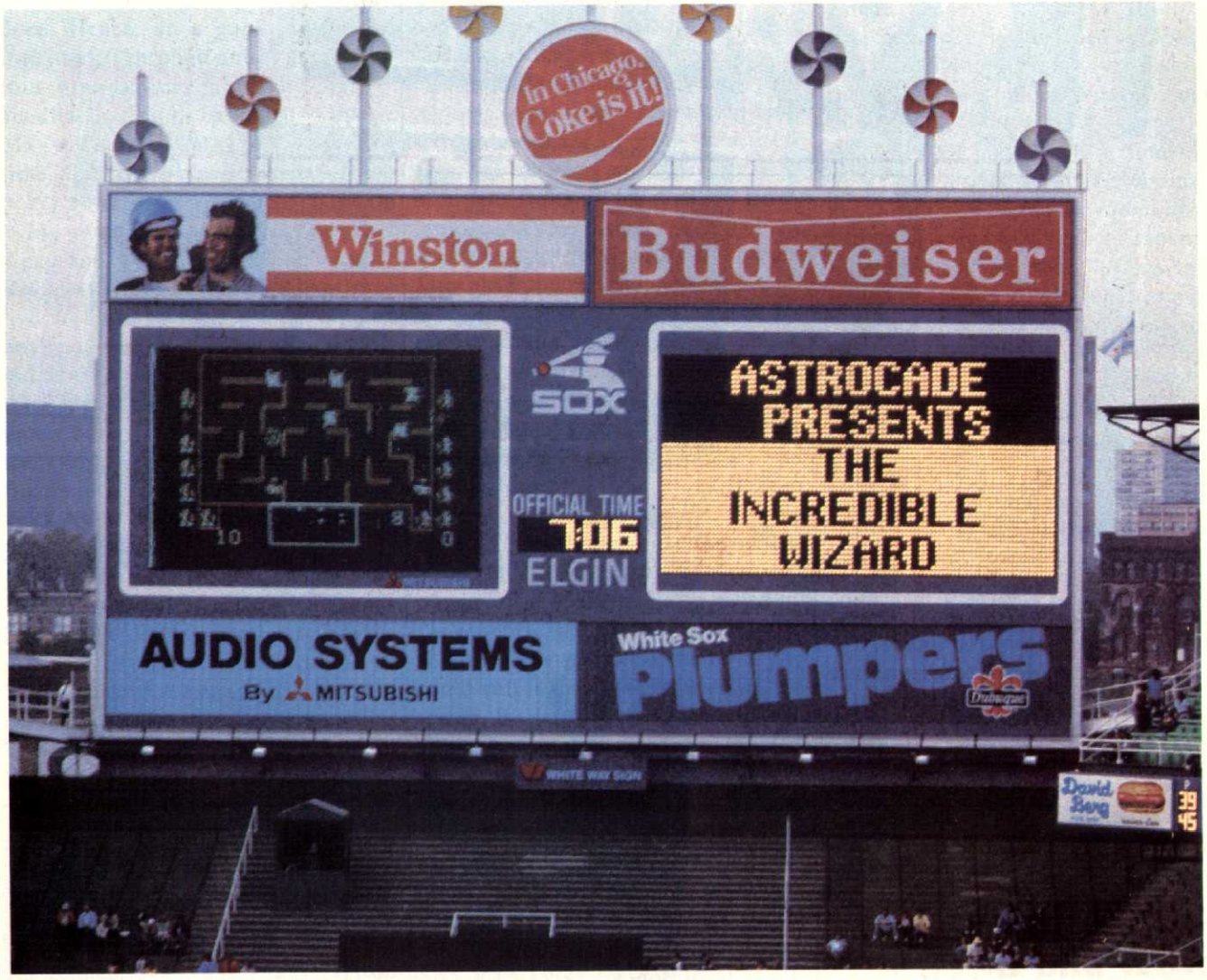
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